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ACORN USER
Conceived from a design and publishing background, the ingredients of this software are pure. More focused than any competition to the tasks that will be required of it, the result is a nirvana for both amateur and professional fellow designers and publishers.
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JULY 2001
ISSUE 235
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Messenger Pro reviewed
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Surftec are pleased to announce the launch of our range of DigiFlash CompactFlash™ and SmartMedia™ card readers.

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Now with support for IBM MicroDrive!

DigiFlash now supports the IBM MicroDrive, either in native FAT16 or even partitioned for RISC OS (including F+ support).

Once the reader has been plugged into the parallel port and PS2 keyboard port (for power), you simply load the RISC OS driver. This device allows other parallel devices to be daisy-chained, such as printers.

When the software has been loaded, just treat the media like a floppy disc, you can copy, delete and rename files while on the CompactFlash or SmartMedia cards.

The Surftec RISC OS drivers provide an extra disc icon allowing the contents of the media to be read and loaded into your favourite Acorn photo software such as ImageMaster, ChangeFSI or PhotoDesk (also available from Surftec).

Card Readers/Drivers/Media

CompactFlash Reader (inc Acorn driver)		£ 79
SmartMedia** Reader (inc Acorn driver)		£ 79
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340MB IBM MicroDrive	NEW PRICE	**£ 219**
1GB IBM MicroDrive	NEW PRICE	**£ 319**

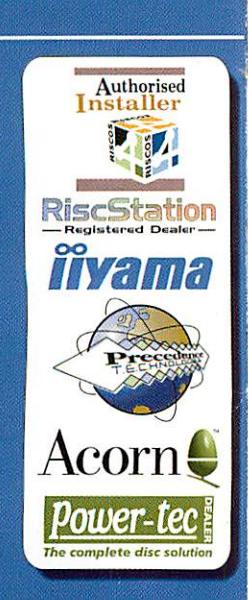
* Surftec driver will not work with all types of card reader, and requires a bi-directional parallel port.
** SmartMedia reader expected launch May 2001.

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July 2001

ACORN USER



Features

Regulars

August issue on sale 12th July 2001



Software is no longer a product — it is now a service. And if you're not paying for it you can't have it. That, essentially, is the dictum that is being passed down from the heights of Gates Castle.

Good solid product is nice for the manufacturer: If you buy yourself a TV and then after a while you decide you don't want it, you can sell it and you don't have it anymore.

Service is another useful thing for the provider: As long as the customer accepts your services they pay you and when they don't pay, they don't get. Plus services often have the advantage of low investment and low overheads.

Software is a completely different kettle of beans, you can own it, you can make an exact copy and sell that on, but you still have it.

In the early days no one thought about it, they just sold the software. Then piracy came in and they started to think very very hard about it. All sorts of protection systems whether software, hardware (dongles) or whatever.

All this was done to prevent the purchaser from copying the software and selling it on (usually more than once). This is not to say that everyone is or was a pirate, but enough are/were to make it a problem.

The next step was the idea that you didn't buy ownership of the software at all, you merely bought a licence to use it. That licence is usually for ever and it is doubtful it had any impression on piracy but it was a step. Software could not be considered a product like a car.

This has gone on for some time and has been working pretty well but now something else has happened.

Sales of PCs have been slowing down which has been having an effect on the income of a certain large corporation, fewer operating systems are getting sold. And upgrades to Window 2000 have been slow.

Time to dream up a new solution, so now we have software renting: You buy a fixed term licence and after, say, three years you have to buy it again. You are entitled to upgrades but the time will come when you will pay again in full.

Yet another reason why RISC OS could be an attractive proposition — unless someone decides to do the same thing here.

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50 mip Arm7500 system with 16Mb memory, (HD version & Hard Drive) , built in ZIP drive support, Midi support, 3D sound, & sampler , 10baseT port as standard, RISCOS 4 as standard, High speed serial , High speed parallel, expandable to **256Mb** memory & hard drive / CD-ROM etc.

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StrongARM Rev "T" with RISC OS 4 **only £299** inc VAT

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CDR 80min 25 pck	£17.01	£19.99
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IDE Zip / LS120 require s/w drivers or RiscStation style hardware support. Parallel Drives inc. RISCOS Software

LS120 IDE int	#	£55.00	£64.62
Zip 100 IDE int	#	**£55.00**	**£64.62**
Zip 250 IDE int	#	**£85.00**	**£99.87**
Zip 250 parallel ext.	#	£129.00	£151.58
Zip 250 SCSI ext.	#	£105.00	£123.37
JAZ 2GB SCSI ext.		£235.00	£276.12
JAZ 2GB Parallel ext.		£299.00	£351.32
Orb 2.2 GB IDE		£165.00	£193.87
Orb 2.2 GB Parrallel		£199.00	£233.83
LS120 Media		£4.00	£4.70
Zip 100 Media		**£7.65**	**£8.99**
Zip 100 Media 5 pack		**£34.03**	**£39.99**
Zip 250 Media		**£10.63**	**£12.49**
Zip 250 Media 5 pack		**£50.00**	**£58.75**

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6x 40x CD Tower (+HD space)	£449 + VAT

Internet Packs from **£85 + VAT (£99.88)** available for all machines include Internet software, ISP setup and 56K modem

RISCOS Ltd announces...

Immediately before the Wakefield Show RISC OS Ltd issued a Press Release about some interesting new developments. Poor wording in the release led to a bad reception for the information among exhibitors and public at Wakefield but clarifications over the following week put a whole new shine on the release.

New versions of RISC OS are to have:

• A new version of CDFS with support for RockRidge extensions, Joliet and mixed mode disc reading. This is very good news of improvement to an aspect that let down other areas of the system;

• The Filer has been improved with: indication of shared discs via file icons; refresh option for filer displays; numeric sorting of names; "lower-case-ifying" option; optional alternate renaming method; create new directory by click on menu entry; sharing of directories made simpler; easier entry of filenames with spaces — i.e you can now just type a Space in a filename entry rather than Alt+Space.

These all seem to be excellent small improvements that could have significant effects on your use of the desktop. The only question seems to be with the use of space in filenames which, while it fits with other systems, may have an adverse knock-on to other areas. This is a wait-and-see, but stick-in-the-muds will doubtless continue to make creative use of capitals within file name instead of spaces.

• Updates to *ChangeFSI* and *Paint* to allow importing of PNG files.

• JPEG export from *Paint*

Both excellent updates but I'm sure there are those that would ask for the same versatility that is increasingly found in third-party applications such as David Pilling's *ImageMaster* that allows a baker's dozen of export formats;

• System application support for the Universal Clipboard system allowing cutting and pasting between compliant applications;

It's not clear how this extends the present situation a, although there is a Universal Clipboard, only a limited range of software supports it;

• New version of *Printers* (1.65) with support for networked printer drivers;

This is the long-awaited addition to RISC OS 4 which produced a new version of *Printers* that was incomplete and although perfect for a limited range of printers was a distinct backward step for some users — and indeed many reverted to using version 1.53;

While RISCOS Ltd will maintain *Printers* and the central driver modules, they will expect dealers/developers to take on the responsibility for creating the printer definition files themselves for any printers they wish to sell. No programming knowledge should be required on the part of the dealers, just an ability to use the *PrintEdit* application supplied.

• Start-up choices to allow user to choose boot device so that booting is possible from CD-ROM, network or hard disc.

• *LanManFS* in ROM along with new Internet stack with *BootP* and *DHCP* support and updated *ShareFS*. This will also work with the Appletalk client module which will be available shortly.

• ROM images larger than 4Mb to support everything being in ROM for machines that may require to boot without a hard disc.

• Improved speed of booting over *ShareFS*;

All excellent news for schools, businesses and the increasing numbers of home networks.

• New configuration applications for fonts, Replay, screen setup and Filer.

• Miscellaneous improvements to kernel

• *Bugz* application for easy reporting of faults.

• *ADFSFiler* quick format

• New integrated *CDPlayer* and *CDFS Filer*

• Graduated Pinboard backdrop

• Multi-user choices

• *GZip* support in *Squash*

• Improved Internet configuration

Together with a range of improvements 'behind the scene' of interest to programmers and detectable by the user in improved speed and handling these all add up to an interesting future.

Assumptions

The problem with the initial announcement was in how we would pay for our improvements and many people, including ourselves, managed to get hold of the wrong end of the stick.

In essence what will happen is that RISCOS Ltd will allow any RISC OS user to buy into the system previously restricted to developers. That is that you can pay an annual fee to get RISC OS upgrades as soon as they are available. Even beta



versions of the upgrades will be issued in this way — but you use those at your own risk.

"The subscription scheme will be called RISC OS Select. The advantage of the scheme is that the timescale for fixing bugs and offering new features will be significantly decreased.

"Future components of RISC OS will be released in two formats: ROM images which can be soft-loaded to replace the existing physical ROM's; And individual modules that can be loaded as part of the Boot sequence.

"The new ROM image and modules can be stored on local Hard Disc, on a Network, or loaded directly from CD."

"All subscribers to RISC OS Select will receive up to three CD's per year. The CD will contain both Beta software and official release versions. It is anticipated that components which are issued as Beta on one CD will become official releases on the next CD. Interim components will also be available from a password protected area of the new RISC OS Select Web site.

"The scheme is suitable both for users who want to be sure of receiving the latest fixes and official releases and also for users who like to have the latest experimental modules and features.

"Subscribers to RISC OS Select will be provided with a method whereby they can choose to just install the release components or else they can try out the latest features, knowing that they can restore to a known working set-up at any time. To do this each Select CD will contain a 'safe' boot image with all the released upgrades and patches pre-installed as a working disc image."

And the price?

"Existing RISC OS 4 users will be able to join the Select Scheme for one year for £105 (or £99 if they are members of the Foundation.)"

As the new system requires RISC OS 4 as a starting point those who haven't yet upgraded to RISC OS 4. There will be an small discount for those users allowing them to upgrade to RISC OS 4 and join RISC OS Select for £179.

The current price for the RISC OS 4.02 ROM and installation CD, without any bundled applications, such as *Vector*, *Writer*, *ImageFS* or the new RISC OS Internet Suite, is £95 or £109 with bundled applications and manuals CD.

If you purchase a RISC OS 4 upgrade and later want to upgrade to RISC OS Select you can do so for £80 instead of the normal £105. This upgrade offer will be available for up to four months after the purchase of RISC OS 4 at the full price but users of machines that were supplied with RISC OS 4 will only be able to join the Select Scheme at the standard price of £105, irrespective of when they purchased their computer.

NB All prices are inclusive of VAT. Overseas subscribers will be charged postage at cost if they wish to receive CD's. They may optionally choose to only receive updates via the Web site.

Application forms for the RISC OS Select Scheme are available from the RISCOS Ltd Web Site at **www.riscos.com/select/**

If this means that any user can buy early access to improvements to the operating system, how does this leave the developers?

Levels of support

Some will undoubtedly be happy using RISC OS Select and developers that only need access to technical documentation will be able to do so by joining the RISC OS Select Scheme. Others will clearly need much more extensive support and these can join the new Registered Developers system which will cost £500 per six months as from 1st June 2001. This will entitle them to direct contact with the RISC OS Development team.

Anyone that joins the RISC OS Select scheme may also apply to be become an affiliate Registered Developer. There will be no fee for becoming an affiliate and they will be able to use the Registered Developers logo.

The Foundation RISC User CD and the RISC OS Products Database Web Site will contain a database of all Registered Developers, and their products. The only requirement for becoming an affiliate and having software included on the database will be that a fully functional version (and any subsequent updates) of the software is supplied to RISCOS Ltd for evaluation and internal use.

As part of the new arrangements the ordinary end user (you and me) will no longer receive technical support by telephone and although we can e-mail **support@riscos.com** for help there is no guarantee of a personal answer; RISCOS Ltd will, however add appropriate new answers to the RISC OS Knowledge Base at **http://support.riscos.com/**

Of course the network of dealers and magazines, including *Acorn User*, will continue to provide a wide range of support for all users.

Support Web sites

To encourage RISC OS Software development, subscribers to the RISC OS Select Scheme will get access to the documentation and resources about RISC OS 4 previously only provided to Registered Developers at **http://support.riscos.com/**

Support for legacy computers and software prior to RISC OS 4 is now available at **http://acorn.riscos.com/** This area also contains the contents of the old Acorn public FTP site along with additional items such as the Acorn Universal Boot application.

RISC OS Internet

As we announced last month, following an agreement with ANT Limited, RISCOS Ltd has now taken over sales and development of the *ANT Internet Suite*, which will now be known as the *RISC OS Internet Suite*.

Improvements and bug fixes to other parts of the suite will start to follow over the next few months. This will primarily revolve around converting the ANT Suite to use a new RISC OS Internet Stack. This will include DHCP support for those of you with cable modem Internet access and also converting the ANT Suite to use the RISC OS Choices system which will allow easy change over between settings when different

Continued on next page





Continued from previous page

people use the same computer or when a computer is used in multiple locations or with multiple ISP's.

For various reasons RISCOS Ltd will not be doing any development on the RISC OS Fresco Web Browser, but they will be making the current version of it available as part of the bundled software with future versions of RISC OS.

The current ANT Suite package is still available with a new reduced price of £49.95 inc VAT (exc delivery) direct from RISCOS Ltd. Purchasers after 1st May will get a free upgrade to the new *RISC OS Internet Suite*, when it is released.

Current users of the *ANT Internet Suite* will be able to upgrade to the new *RISC OS Internet Suite* when it is released later in the year.

There will be no major updates to the Suite at present, but it will have a number of changes made to its internal structure to allow it to integrate with the new features being planned for the RISC OS Internet Stack. The new stack will provide new features such as BootP and DHCP support. While the new RISC OS Internet Suite will use the standard Internet Stack rather than the having to have a separate stack as at present. The new Suite will also provide support for multi-user choices which is to be a new feature of RISC OS 4.

Support for using the ANT Suite will be provided by Paul Vigay who will provide three levels of support:

Free support available from his web site. **www.vigay.com/ant/index.html**

Annual Subscriber Scheme (E-mail) enabling you to submit problems via e-mail, and to receive personalised help with individual problems. Membership: £45.00 per year (or £25.00 for registered AntUtils users)

Annual Subscriber Scheme (Phone or E-mail) which provides the same level of support as the e-mail-only scheme above, but also allows telephone support between 6:30pm and 9:00pm, with fax support at other times.

Membership: £55.00 per year (or £35.00 for registered AntUtils users)

The RISC OS Internet Suite will be available in four formats:

- As a stand-alone product for users who do not currently have any internet connection software. This will include all the current components of the ANT Suite.
- As a part of RISC OS 4 upgrades under the RISC OS Select Scheme or for new purchasers of RISC OS 4.
- Possibly bundled with new machines supplied by RISC OS manufacturers.
- As an upgrade for existing users of the *ANT Suite* and *Voyager* package who don't subscribe to the RISC OS Select Scheme.

32-bit RISC OS

All the above relates to the next (26-bit) version of RISC OS. There has also been considerable debate over the development of 32-bit versions of RISC OS, which were to be called RISC OS 5. Up until January 2001 it had been expected that a 32-bit version of RISC OS would be required to support new processors in a relatively short time span, since 26-bit processors were expected to have a very limited remaining availability.

At present however RISCOS Ltd does not have any customers who have made any commitment that requires the production of a 32-bit version of RISC OS and it appears that the availability of 26-bit processors will continue for longer than was expected. Consequently all their development resources are being put in to enhancing the features of existing 26-bit RISC OS.

Whether this turns out to be a good move will have to be seen.

The Tyrrell corporation

PS2MouseMini provides users of all RISC OS machines with a PS/2 mouse port (with the exception of A7000 and RiscStation machines which already have such a port).

The device marries Stuart Tyrrell Developments' proven track record in novel interface design with the renowned PCB design and manufacture expertise of Simtec Electronics, and provides high functionality in a tiny adaptor. The interface is a short gender-changer style cable, providing strain relief to ensure the connector remains protected. PS2MouseMini is available for £18.95 inc VAT and carriage.

STDMMK is a multimedia keyboard for users of Risc PC, A7000 and RiscStation machines. Unlike most current multimedia keyboards, STDMMK is a "click" type, providing positive feedback of key presses.

It has 19 separate multimedia keys providing control over Web browsing, along with CD functions and access to common applications – changed by writing obey files or Basic programs.

The keyboard is supplied with RISC OS and PC drivers, and is complete with an ergonomic wrist support. STDMMK costs £34.95 inc VAT and carriage.

Get in touch with stuart on **stuart@stdevel.demon.co.uk** and at: PO Box 183, Oldham OL2 8FB Web: **www.stdevel.demon.co.uk** Tel: 0845 458 8803 / 01706 848 600 Fax: 0870 164 1604

In brief

On the small screen

While one half of the world want larger LCD screens for their computers the other half want even smaller screens. Samsung have just announced the availability of 2-inch colour TFT-LCDs for mobile phones.

The company is already big in the large screen market and now intends to sell 1 million of the new small screens in the first year. The screens use reflection TFT-LCD technology which makes use of external light to achieve power consumption of only one-fifth the power of conventional models.

The phones that use this technology will be accessing the Internet and other functions overlapping those of a laptop computer.

http://samsungelectronics.com

Seeking Paradise

We were intrigued when we found ourselves next to Paradise at the Wakefield Show — especially when its decor appeared to consist entirely of black plastic.

It turns out that they were (and are) selling graphics tablets and keyboards with a graphics area complete with pressure sensitive software for use with a range of graphics programs including PhotoDesk, Studio24Pro, DA's Picture and, with the Eesox driver software, even ArtWorks. There was even a hint on an alternative to this last requirement so keep your eyes on www.paradise-uk.net

Paint Pal Tablet 5in x 4in £65
Palm Pal Tablet 3in x 2in £50 (not pressure sensitive)
Pen Keyboard (3in x 2in tablet) £90

You can find Paradise at 38 Marlborough Drive, Sydenham, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV31 1GD

Vantage — at last!

As predicted in Acorn User, Cerilica has reached the release version of its powerful design and publishing

Continued...

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R7500 Lite+ — To Lite prices, please add £94.00

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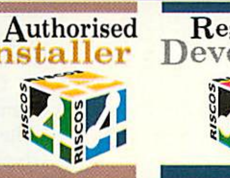
R7500 Scorcher — To Lite prices, please add £315.00
R7500 Scorcher Twindeck (as Scorcher, with additional 48x CD drive) — To Lite prices, add £349.00

The Networx model is a Lite without the HD or CD fitted. Monitors are available as with the Lite.
R7500 Networx (no monitor) — £480.00

The Networx HD model is the same as the Networx, but has a (minimum of) 2Gb HD fitted as standard.
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Portable — £Call







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16Mb FPM	£28.20
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64Mb EDO (works in Risc PCs)	£60.95
64Mb FPM	£114.50
128Mb FPM	£272.95
128Mb EDO	£209.75
1Mb VRAM	£45.00
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RiscStation MIDI drivers & cable	£17.95
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Music & Sound Programmer's Guide	£16.95
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Fatar SL 880	£600.00
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Yamaha MU128 module	£744.00
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Sibelius 7 Student	£319.95
Sibelius 7	£520.95
Sibelius for PC/Mac is also available	
Optical Manuscript	£259.00
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Ethernet card (Combi NIC slot)	£116.30
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Omega 10BaseT PCI card	£62.25
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PS/2 pipe convertor for older machines	£23.95
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Risc PC second slice (no PSU)	£95.00
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RiscStation internal modem pack	£99.95
RiscStation second serial port	£Call
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StrongARM & RISC OS 3.7	£269.00
StrongARM & RISC OS 4	£299.00
Triple serial card	£99.95
ViewFinder card	£235.00

Other Software

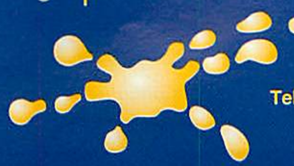
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RISC OS Manuals CD	£29.95



Discs (e.g.10x white discs – £4.99, 20x black discs – £6.93, 50x black discs – £13.99)
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New machine

There was much speculation about a possible new machine from Castle — and indeed they have produced a 300MHz version of the Kinetic Risc PC. What no-one seems to have guessed was a machine from Cumana/Cannon Computing (in association with Castle).

The SLYM is certainly a svelte model (and the name is *supposed* to be pronounced "slim") but it must be emphasised that it's intended to be connected to a network and appears to be aimed at schools. The 'SLYM' design concept features RISC OS technology built into a LCD Screen housing, providing a very compact terminal to access Acorn and PC environments on a network using Citrix. There are a number of potential applications for this type of machine and the development of the production model is now underway.

When faced with the need for multiple workstations on a network, SLYM will provide an efficient, low-cost solution. It is an extremely powerful computer, able to use both RISC OS and Windows software. Connecting SLYM to a Microsoft Windows NT Server will provide a low maintenance, easily manageable, solution for NGfL and other network requirements.

Cumana/Cannon have an ICT Planning Document for schools.

This is a system to provide cross-platform software compatibility with low client station capital and running costs, while providing higher levels of reliability. To explain, you need a network infrastructure, typically an NT server and any number of thin client computers, or Network Computers (NCs).

All the thin clients are controlled from a central NT server (or servers), which hold user configurations that are centrally administered. User home directories are set up and these provide private data storage with the option of additional shared work folders as well as shared resources.

With the aid of central profiles and policies user settings can be preset so that users always receive the same fixed and restricted desktop environment and thus as client systems cannot be re-configured locally this minimises client station problems. As NCs have no floppy disc drive it is impossible to introduce viruses or indeed pirate software from these client stations. Other standard desktop computers, both new and old specifications can be added to the system if required and these can comprise a mix of Acorns, Apple Macs and PCs.

The proposed specifications of SLYM

- ARM 7500FE (56Mhz)
- 32Mb EDO
- 8Mb Flash
- 10/100 Network card with Activity light
- 2x PS2 ports
- Serial port
- Headphone out
- Audio In
- Parallel Port
- SVGA Port
- USB (not connected at present)
- RISC OS 4.03
- Oregano Web Browser (Internet Ready)
- Optional Cordless Keyboard & Mouse



Price to be confirmed in July 2001.
www.cumana.net/products/slym/nc.htm

In brief

software. Vantage should be shipping at about the time this issue of Acorn User goes on sale. Cerilica Limited, PO Box 40, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7WH Tel: 0870 2411731 E-mail: cerilica@cerilica.com Web: www.cerilica.com

Getting it to market

A new company at Wakefield was Co-Comp. Co-Comp demonstrated their faith in the RISC OS market when they made the decision to enter the market immediately after Acorn decided to leave. As well as being a RISC OS dealer Co-Comp has designed M@rket-Live, a secure on-line shopping basket system, and is now introducing a junior version of the system that should be of interest to RISC OS dealers.

You can see the system at: www.co-comp.co.uk and find the company at: PO Box 199, Preston, Lancs PR1 9SS. Tel 01772 496659. E-mail: enquiry@co-comp.co.uk

Breaking the silence

After about 2 years of silence, VoiceCon 0.08 has just been released by Jason Tribbeck, and is available from www.tribbeck.com/voicecon/

VoiceCon is a phrase-based speech recognition program for RISC OS 3.5+ for people using the following samplers (with microphones): VTi Printer Port Sampler, VTi SoundByte recorder, Argo SoundByte recorder, NorthWest SEMERC ReSound, Armadillo A448, Armadillo A448M, RiscStation 7500.

It has had the following additions from the last non-beta release: Opening of URLs, Improved recognition, improved editing capability, improved profile system, introduction of device drivers.

On the Web site is also some information about using a headset microphone (typically supplied with modems) with samplers to improve recognition still further.

Continued...

Upgrade frenzy

Justin Fletcher has recently released upgrades of a range of software that he and others have developed or now maintain. These include:

MP3Encode 1.07 which can now be downloaded from **www.movspclr.co.uk /software.html#mp3encode**

MP3Encode is a front end for the various command line Audio MPEG (MP3) encoders. A number of files can be queued for automatic encoding, allowing it to be used for batch encoding of raw PCM (CD) data or .wav files.

MP3ID3 1.06 from **www.movspclr.co.uk/software.html#mp3id3**

MP3ID3 is a desktop application for editing the ID3v1.1 tags present on Audio MPEG (MP3) files. These tags provide meta-information about the track such as the artist, album and track name.

MP3ID3 can edit these fields, forcibly override the defaults in the files, or guess new contents for them. ID3v1 tag information can be used by most Audio MPEG decoders, including AMPlayer.

MP3Info 1.05 (the first released version) is at **www.movspclr.co.uk /software.html#mp3info**

MP3Info is a desktop application for displaying information about audio MPEG (MP3) files. Information is provided by the AMPlayer module for other tasks to use, and *MP3Info* is a demonstration of how that facility can be put to use.

AMPlayer 1.33 which can be downloaded from **www.armware.dk/files/**

AMPlayer is a module for playing Audio MPEG files. It supports MPEG 1.0, 2.0 and 2.5 layer I, II, and III. ID3 is a means by which files containing Audio MPEG data can be 'tagged' with information about the file, like the Author, Album, Track name, and so on.

CMunge 0.21 can now be downloaded from **www.movspclr.co.uk/software.html#cmunge**

CMunge is a free CMHG replacement. Like CMHG, it generates module headers for C programs, allowing them to be used like normal modules. It supports the vast majority of CMHG features, plus a selection of its own. Both source and binary version are available.

AMP16 1.01 (another first release) from **www.movspclr.co.uk/software.html#amp16** This is the first release of *AMP16*, a 16 band graphic equaliser for AMPlayer.

Featuring 16 modifiable bands to tweak your MP3 output and the ability to 'lock' certain bands and have other bands fit themselves in a curve between locked bands.

Colour bar in action

Another Wakefield regular who has been prolific recently is Martin Würthner who released *ColourBar* in time for the show. Martin's new *ColourBar* module will change the way you work with *ArtWorks*, and I am sure that you will wonder how you ever managed without it.

ColourBar displays a colour bar (free-floating or attached to the main document window like the Info Bar) with all the colours defined in your current document. You can apply fill and line colours by either clicking on a colour (applies to the current selection) or by dragging a colour from the *ColourBar* to an object in your document.

No need to select any object, no need to switch to a dedicated tool. The previously long-winded procedure of applying a colour is reduced to a single click-and-drag operation. In some ways this is even easier than the new *Vantage* system of applying colour and it will be interesting to hear from readers how they find the two systems compare in actual use.

You can find more details and a screenshot on the *ColourBar* home page: **www.mw-software.com/software/awmodules/colourbar.html**

ColourBar costs only £12.50 (or DM 40 or 20.45 Euro) from MW Software, Mannheimer Str. 18, 67655 Kaiserslautern, Germany. E-mail: **martin@mw-software.com**

In brief

R-Comp gone crazy

It was only to be expected that R-Comp would be making their mark; this year it included a new product, NetFetch and many updates.

NetFetch can best be described as "DialUp without the Dial"! It is designed for use by people connecting to the internet through networks, routers, ADSL, Cable and so on. Indeed, it shares much in common with DialUp, from configuration to interface, making it an ideal companion.

NetFetch is being released alongside DialUp to those who need it. In other words, you order DialUp or the R-Comp Suite, and ask for NetFetch.

The software derives its name from the simplicity with which you can set up mail/news fetching over a network. It shares DialUp's simple interface, and also supports the various protocols that DialUp offers, allowing NetFetch users to benefit from Dialup-enhanced programs.

NetFetch makes setting up periodic mail/news fetching trivial, so you can leave the software running, picking up your mail every 15 mins, for example. It also includes an Internet panel similar to DialUp, and other features.

NetFetch is also supplied with RCI's Network/Print server boxes which offer shared internet connections for your home or small business network, as well as shared printing. Indeed, NetFetch was written because boxes like these benefit from easy to use software, but the dialling part of DialUp becomes irrelevant

Other R-Comp updated software includes DialUp (v 1.58); SiteMaster 2+; WebsterXL browser (v1.98e) with improved JavaScript and in-page bookmarks; Messenger Pro 2.50 (and a preview of Messenger Pro Server Edition was seen at Wakefield).

Contacting AU

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Marking Time

For many people, time is a commodity that there just never seems to be enough of, and yet, even though every Acorn computer since the BBC Micro has always had a built-in clock, many Acorn users fail to keep their machines set to the right time.

If you're an e-mail or Usenet news user, accurate timekeeping becomes even more important, especially for keeping track of when messages arrive and which messages you want to read.

Apart from the bundled application Time, found in the newly renamed RISC OS Internet Suite, there are also several other simple time-setting utilities available for RISC OS users which actually synchronises your machine clock to the Internet. A number of Web sites and many ISPs operate an Internet Time Service.



All we need now is to GeT Java...

The Demon Internet time servers such as **ntp.demon.co.uk** are synchronised onto master GPS and atomic clocks on the Internet using the Network Time Protocol (NTP) and respond to queries using the Time and NTP protocols. Both these protocols return the elapsed time since midnight on the 1st of January 1900 GMT.

Your machine converts this to local time using its timezone and daylight-saving-time settings. RISC OS time-setting utilities such as Joseph Heenan's FreeTime (**www.ping.demon.co.uk/acorn /download.htm#freetime**) issues time requests to the server's default Time port (37).

Elliott Hughes' Simple NTP client utility sntp, (available from **http://users. ch.genedata.com/~enh/riscos/**) makes an NTP request on the default NTP port (123).

If you have a PC you can download a utility from **www.get-time.org** to set its clock to the "new" Greenwich Electronic Time. Unfortunately this site doesn't work properly with Fresco or Oregano, as the on-screen UTC time display needs a later version of Java that we can get hold of. Oops!

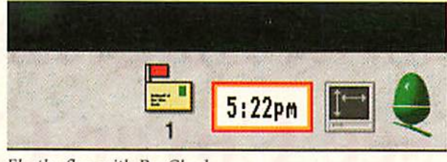
Check your box

PopCheck is a useful little utility that sits on your iconbar and periodically interrogates selected POP3 Mail servers to check if there is any e-mail waiting for download.

When mail is found, there's a beep and the red flag pops up on its iconbar image and the count of waiting mail items is shown.

Written by Richard Goodwin and Jon Ripley, *PopCheck* can be configured to monitor up to 100 e-mail boxes, totalling the count of items in them on the iconbar. Right-clicking on its icon can start up e-mail retrieval by your system's POP3 mail fetcher, and resets the count to zero.

For *PopCheck* to work automatically, you'll need either to be permanently online or already logged in, or have dial-on-demand set up in your dialler. The version I tested had some problems with the delay time settings.



Fly the flag with PopCheck

An improved version may be available by the time you read this. Otherwise, to get a five minute update, I had to set, save and reload the options with the delay multiplier set to seconds rather than minutes, and then use the iconbar menu to re-select the "second" multiplier.

www.goodwin.uk.com/richard/programs/

In brief

RISC OS gets DHCP

Now we know why they were being so cagey about a RISC OS client for DHCP (Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol). RISCOS Ltd have taken over sales and development of the ANT Internet Suite, to be renamed the RISC OS Internet Suite.

Planned improvements include DHCP support urgently needed for cable modem and ADSL use, and a new RISC OS Internet Stack. Sadly the Fresco© browser is not included in the development plan, but the existing version will included in the RISC OS Suite. It's still not clear whether ANT© Ltd intend to pass back any of their ongoing Fresco evolution to the RISC OS platform.

Don't hold your breath.

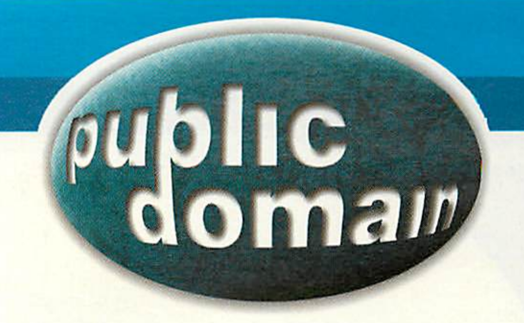
Smbserver updated

Complementary to ANT's *Omniclient* and WSS's *LanMan98,* David R. H. Buxton's port of *Samba* for RISC OS allows *Windows* and *Unix* machines to share RISC OS discs. His latest version fixes some bugs and now reports the sizes of larger RISC OS discs correctly to clients on other platforms.

SmbServer is an essential item for anyone who has a RISC OS machine networked to *Windows* and *Unix* boxes. I find it invaluable for dropping news items across the network to a RISC OS RAM disc for incorporation into this page. David has a new software site hosted by NTLWorld where you can find SmbServer 0.07a.

!SmbServer
http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ davidrhb/downloads/ samba007a.zip

Contacting me
David Dade:
comms@acornuser.com



No such thing as a free launch?

StrongMen is another useful application launcher and hotlist manager, which includes some other useful utilities all built into a very unobtrusive application.

Once you load the main application it sits invisibly in the background with no icons or windows to clutter up the screen. However, to invoke *StrongMen* simply move the mouse pointer to the far left of the screen and click a mouse button. Instead of getting the familiar Pinboard menu, you'll see a *StrongMen* menu. The actual menu you see depends upon which mouse button you pressed:

Select opens a user definable menu containing pretty much whatever you like including your own applications or directories. One useful facility is the 'History' submenu. This contains the past few files loaded and allows you to select one from last applications, C sources, BASIC files, text files or images. You can go straight to this 'history' menu by clicking *Menu* when the pointer is at the far left of the screen.

One additional utility, available from the history sub-menu is an 'Open files' submenu, which not only displays all the currently open files on the computer but will close any that you select from the menu, which is handy if a program quits without closing its files correctly.

Clicking *Adjust* will open the hotlist menu, which allows you to manage a hierarchical database of Web links or email addresses. Different Web sites can be categorised under user-definable sub-menus such as programming, entertainment, news and so on, so you can easily find the link you require.

StrongMen is written by *StrongED* author Guttorm Vik, and available to download from his Web site at **http://home.eunet.no/~guttorvi/strong.html**

Where did the links go?

If you've wondered where some of the links have gone to on my own web site, then not to worry. I've been overhauling the site, which had become rather sprawling over the past year or so. As I've built up quite a collection of support documents and help guides, not to mention my collection of RISC OS Shareware, it was getting rather untidy and many people complained that they couldn't find what they were looking for.

I've thus redesigned it around a dedicated search engine which can quickly locate the exact file you require. All URLs now start **www.vigay.com/cgi-bin/search?a=** and are followed by the file or document you require — thus my Internet support page is now found at **www.vigay.com/cgi-bin/search?a=internet**

Don't worry if you don't know the exact name of the file because I've implemented a search engine that can locate the file for you. If it can't find a matching file it will even give you the opportunity to search other Web sites.

As a side-effect of the site essentially being a huge database of information, I've implemented an automatic statistics page which will generate the top ten articles and downloads as well as the last ten items searched for. Not only does this help to show what's popular, but I can also spot what people are searching for most frequently in order for me to maintain the database with up to date information tailored to people's needs.

Even the dreaded "Error 404" when you try going to a non-existent page is now gone, replaced with a site guide from which you can select an area of enquiry. Feel free to pay it a visit next time you're online.

Change that app

AltTab is a useful little module which allows you to bring selected windows to the front easily. This will appeal to people who have used Windows and like the ability to use Alt+Tab to switch between active tasks.

When you hit Alt+Tab the first time, a thin blue bar will appear along the top of the screen and the first open window will have a cross hatched grid appear over it. Each time you hit Alt+Tab, the cross-hatching will move to the next window and the bar at the top updates to reflect the name of the window.

Just keep hitting Alt+Tab until the window you require is highlighted. Then, let go of Alt+Tab and the required window will immediately jump to the front. Handy if you, like me, have many windows cluttering up your screen real estate.

AltTab is freeware and written by Thomas Leonard. It's available to download from his Web site at **www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~tal197/desktop.php3**

Getting it all down

This is another little gem from prolific programmer Bernard Veasey and is an essential extra to your collection of indispensable disc utilities, as you can never be sure when you may need it.

It's a text viewer with a difference — you can view files of any size, even bigger than the available memory in your machine. It does this by loading bits of the file at a time into a viewer window. You can scale this window to whatever size you like and *ReadLarge* will just read the portion of data that fits the window.

This means you can view any enormous files that you might otherwise not be able to do anything with. This might be especially useful if a file has become corrupt, seemingly with a block of gobbledegook in the middle of it, or to view large Web logs and so on.

A small navigation bar allows you to move forwards and backwards through the file, either byte-by-byte, line-by-line or page-by-page. Alternatively you can jump right to the beginning or end.

The toolbar also displays the byte position you are currently viewing within the file, so that you know where abouts you are.

If you want you can even save blocks of the file, thus allowing you to extract or recover data into a new file. Because *ReadLarge* displays control codes as well as ASCII characters you can use it to examine any file.

Viewing the contents of my PC partition, which is 300MB long — larger than the amount of memory even in a fully expanded Risc PC.

ReadLarge can be downloaded from Bernard's web site at:

www.argonet.co.uk/users/bernard.veasey/soft.html

Top Twenty Links:
Courtesy of www.riscos.org

No.	Visits	Description
1	237	ARM Debug - A disassembler, editor and multistepper for ARM code, by Theo v/d Boogaert Homepage: http://www.vd-boogaert.myweb.nl/ Status: ?
2	218	Citation - A bibliography manger for handling the references in scientific and technical papers. Incorporates the features of Endnote and Papyrus with the useful drag-and-drop of RISCOS., by Dr.Tim Dawson Homepage: http://www.darwin.u-net.com Status: Shareware
3	170	VideoPlus - converts VideoPlus codes into times and dates and vice versa, by James MacDonald Homepage: http://www.topeka.clara.net/vp118.zip Status: Freeware
4	160	SplitMPEG - convert from MPEG to Acorn Replay, by Unknown Homepage: ftp://ftp.argonet.co.uk/pub/Acorn/PD/Graphics/ Status: Freeware
5	155	VProtect - Latest virus protection module, by Pineapple Software Homepage: http://www.pineaple.demon.co.uk/instv.zip Status: ?
6	137	MP3Radio - A RISC OS client for playing internet radio stations using audio MPEG streams, by Philip Hardy Homepage: http://www.philspages.co.uk/downloads.htm Status: Freeware
7	126	Flash - A slightly improved version of Leo's Flash player, by Henrik Pederson. Homepage: http://login.dknet.dk/~henrik/ Status: ?
8	121	WavEdit - A disk based WAV format sample editor, by Robert Hancox Homepage: http://www.tophole.freeserve.co.uk/software/wav.htm Status: ?
9	120	DigitalCD - A desktop music player for RISC OS, by André Timmermans Homepage: http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Horizon/4471/dev.htm Status: Freeware
10	119	Acorn files - Various 'official' Acorn patches and updates., by Acorn Homepage: http://www.acorn.co.uk/ftp/riscos/releases/ Status: ?
11	114	GraphWorks - User-friendly interface to graph-plotting program with numerous options., by Aurelien Botman Homepage: http://www.srcf.ucam.org/~ab384/graph.html Status: Freeware
12	114	Chockcino - Java 1.1 virtual machine, by Peter Naulls/Warm Silence Software Homepage: http://free.prohosting.com/~chocky/ Status: Commercial
13	113	POPstar2 - Improved version of POPstar, by Joseph Heenan Homepage: http://www.ping.demon.co.uk/acorn/ Status: ?
14	107	VideoPlus - RISC OS port of the DOS VideoPlus codec, by James MacDonald Homepage: http://www.netbook.demon.co.uk/ Status: ?
15	106	ArcWeb - The best freebie web browser for Acorn machines., by Stewart Brodie Homepage: http://louis.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~snb94r/arcweb/arcweb.html Status: ?
16	103	!Boot and Module Database - Paul Vigay's database of module version numbers and !Boot information., by Paul Vigay Homepage: http://www.vigay.com/riscos/mods.html Status: ?
17	97	Zap - Arguably the best RISC OS text editor (well, it's my favourite!), by Mixed Homepage: http://www.zap.uk.eu.org/ Status: ?
19	89	FTPc - GUI FTP client for RISC OS, by Colin Granville Homepage: http://www.ftpc.iconbar.com/ Status: ?
20	74	MDFs - Carlos Michael Santillan's extensive list of monitor definition files, by Carlos Michael Santillan Homepage: http://www.arcsite.de/hp/cms/emdf.html Status: ?

A total smartie

Another useful disc utility. This time from Tony Houghton. *SmartOpenDir* is as it sounds, allowing you to specify certain directories to open intelligently to display large or small icons or full info, or even date.

You may for instance want your clip-art directory to have large icons, whereas a programming development directory may benefit from displaying full info and sorted in date order.

The source code is provided on Tony's Web site so you are free to modify the code for your own requirements, but do ask Tony if you want to redistribute any of it.

SmartOpenDir is available to download from **www.realh.co.uk**

Contacting AU

Paul Vigay:
pdpage@acornuser.com

All products are compatible with StrongARM and RISC OS 4
Some products are enhanced for RISC OS 4
All prices include VAT and UK carriage (where applicable)

HERE IS THE NEWS...

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WebsterXL £25
Fully-featured Web browser, tuned to work with HTMLEdit
Enhanced Web Designer's Toolkit £30
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WebSpell (HTML-aware spelling checker) **£15**

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SiteMaster 2+ £30
Site management tools for checking, moving, publishing and uploading whole or partial web sites.
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Store and manage your clip-art collection with great ease

Internet Utilities

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- Flexible view options, such as a powerful threading mode
- Offline and Network (£40) versions available.

WebsterXL £25
Browser with support for advanced Web technologies
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DialUp £20
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Was it worth

Andrew Green gives the expert users viewpoint on the killer app

Nearly three years ago, a group of RISC OS professionals and graphic artists were gathered in a hotel in Ross-On-Wye to witness the unveiling of the earliest beta version of an already much-vaunted new killer app: Cerilica *Vantage*.

The journey to release has taken far, far longer than anyone — especially Cerilica themselves — would initially have expected. Even now, some of the features in the development roadmap will need to wait until later versions. But with the fundamentals firmly in place, are they worth the wait?

Three years is a long time for hype not to lose momentum, and most of the product's most exciting features have long since stopped being news. But the world hasn't changed enough that the technologies which have always made *Vantage* such a unique project have become outdated or obsolete.

There still isn't anything, on RISC OS or elsewhere, which offers the colour management flexibility, rendering detail, workflow fluidity, font control or design elegance Vantage claims to possess.

This review is based on version 0.99b, as demonstrated at Wakefield 2001. There are only a few features promised for version 1.0 that I haven't been able to test, a selection of bugs yet to be eliminated, and no doubt an assortment of existing features I haven't even found. Nonetheless, the software has reached a kind of stability and completion that allows for a reasonable perspective of the final package, and the opportunity to finally test it in anger.

Getting what you want

At the heart of *Vantage* is the *TRUISM II* ink simulation engine. If you've never had artwork back from the printers only to find to your horror that the colours are sickeningly wrong, or if you only ever use a drawing package to create on-screen graphics for Web pages, *Vantage*'s manic focus on inks can only disappoint.

But it's worth dwelling on the colour simulation issue for a little while, not only because everything else in the program is subsidiary to it, but also because it's deeply revolutionary technology.

Your screen builds colours out of combining amounts of red, green or blue light, and the higher the amount of light, the brighter the colour. Printing works the opposite way: the colour of the paper onto which you're printing is generally the brightest colour available, with the addition of inks allowing only for darker colours.

The exception to this might be printing fully opaque, Tippex-like, inks, which even then don't get any brighter by being added to other inks. Most printing uses only four inks: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Key (black) which allow for far fewer colours than your screen can display. All of this means that defining colours on-screen without reference to the inks you'll finally use for printing can easily result in huge discrepancies.

Figure I shows a real-life project of mine from some years ago. I used *ArtWorks* to create a new logo for my old Students' Union, which featured a strong purple colour — which you probably can't see because we're using CMYK printing for the magazine. But since *ArtWorks* doesn't simulate the results of actually printing the colours I'd defined, the printed results were a nasty, fee-crushing surprise.

Had TRUISM been around back then, I'd have been paid properly. Saving out the image as an *ArtWorks EPS* and importing this into *Vantage* gives me Figure II, and it's what I saw when the printers delivered the goods.

Different packages handle this problem in different ways. *ArtWorks* is something of an easy target, because it doesn't even attempt to represent CMYK colours faithfully. Other drawing applications (and DTP software such as *Ovation Pro*) have reasonable CMYK simulation hardwired.

High-end applications on the Macintosh can make use of *ColorSync*, Apple's brandname for ICC colour



Figure I: The Kent Union logo, as designed in ArtWorks



Figure II: The same logo, exported from ArtWorks and imported into Vantage, displayed with ink simulation

the wait?

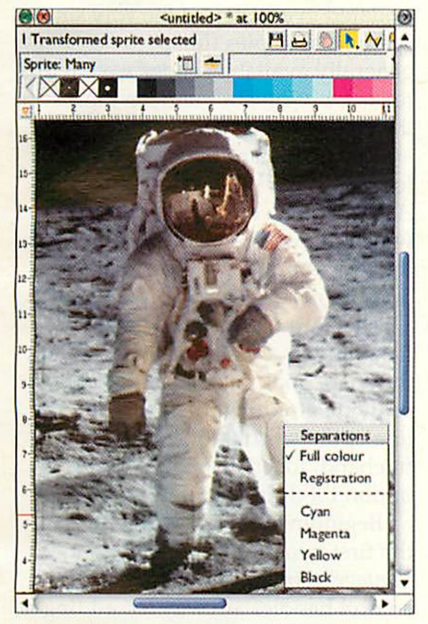


Figure III: An RGB photograph live-separated by Vantage into CMYK

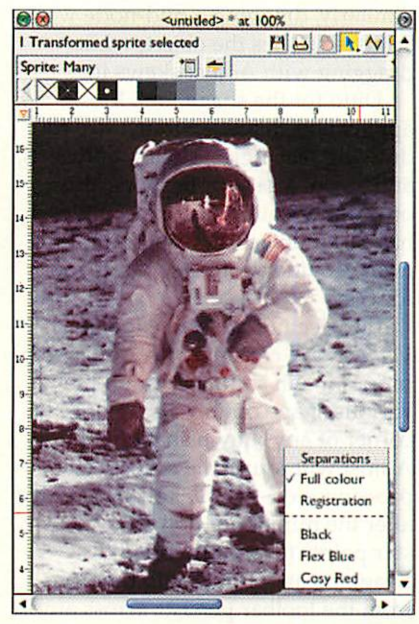


Figure IV: The same RGB photograph, live-separated into a customised inkset

profiling, whereby the colour output properties of specific devices using pre-specified insets can be simulated on screen with some considerable accuracy.

TRUISM takes a wholly different approach. Once you've calibrated your monitor (using the separate *!Monitor* application provided), *Vantage* allows you to visually define your inks, combines them with some extremely clever programming to simulate the physics of subtractive colour definitions, and sets appropriate RGB values to the result. The upshot is that *Vantage* can simulate the printed output of any arbitrary inkset, and will only represent colours achievable by those inks.

You just can't get *Vantage* to display colours that can't be printed. If you drop an RGB image into a Vantage document, the image is live-separated across the inkset that you have defined, and re-combined as an RGB simulation of that.

Each individual separation is independently viewable, for whatever inks you've decided to use, something which itself is next to impossible in other applications, which even if they allow you to define spot colours, are single-minded in their approach to printing: "you're using CMYK anyway, aren't you?"

Vantage doesn't limit you to CMYK in the slightest. Want to print using three Pantone inks instead? Grab your colour swatches and set up your inks: *Vantage* will faithfully represent on screen exactly what you'll get, even interpreting photographs as accurately as possible according to those inks.

Figure III shows an RGB photograph live-separated by *Vantage* into CMYK, while Figure IV shows the same photograph set to print using only Black, Flex Blue and Cosy Red inks, with the shift in colour balance that would inevitably entail. The screenshot of Figure IV has, of course, been re-converted (again using TRUISM) to CMYK — which is partly why it uses an inkset that gives noticeably worse results than CMYK.

Nothing else, anywhere, does this. Even *ArtPro* on the Macintosh, which can cost an impressive £20,000 per year to license and simulates arbitrary inks, doesn't live-separate RGB images in this way. And *Vantage* takes it further still: the colour you define your paper to be affects the colours you can print, depending on the opacity of the inks you use.

Ultimately, though, a limitation is imposed by the power of the hardware currently available to RISC OS. *Vantage* stores data regarding not only the colour and opacity of the inks, but also the order in which they are to be printed, and whether or not you've set any of your colours to overprint. Overprinting yellow, which isn't at all opaque, onto blue ought to result in a shade of green being represented on screen just as you'd get on paper.

However, it's at this point that the *Vantage* renderer gives up: the StrongARM is just too slow to perform the additional calculations after all jumping through all the other hoops provided by base ink colour, paper colour, object transparency, and so on. It's hardly a great failing of TRUISM, though, and is certain to be addressed by newer and faster hardware.

So, even if you never need to veer away from the default CMYK settings, *Vantage* presents you with greater colour accuracy than you've ever had before. No ugly surprises to spoil your fun and ruin your invoice. But if you never use a drawing package for colour printing, only for on-screen artwork, *Vantage*'s approach might get in the way of your creativity.

Some compensation might, however, be afforded by the phenomenal renderer used by the application. We're spoiled on RISC OS by having quality anti-aliasing

everywhere. On other platforms, anti-aliasing in a drawing program is often treated very much as an afterthought, and isn't necessarily very good.

Like the RISC OS font manager, *ArtWorks* uses a smooth 16 levels of anti-aliasing while you work, but *Vantage* uses a preposterous 200,000 (and then some). This results in a *fantastically* smooth display, which can provide extra levels of detail just where it matters most for screen-based designs.

Ken yer tel wot it is yit?

Regardless of the applications to which *Vantage*'s core technology can be put, the package as a whole depends upon the drawing environment and tools to be smooth, intuitive and powerful. *Vantage* employs a very lean, dense approach to the tools and functions it has on offer, and is tightly bound to RISC OS approaches.

Unlike most other drawing programs, there are relatively few independent tools in *Vantage*, with related functions being carried out by using the Adjust mouse button, or an arsenal of keyboard shortcuts.

For example, there aren't separate select, rotate and resize tools. When you select an object using Vantage's select tool, dragging a corner node with Select resizes the object, dragging with Adjust rotates it. Similarly, dragging a mid-node with Select squashes the object, while dragging with Adjust skews it.

Ditto for the shape tool. Most applications have separate tools for drawing rectangles, circles, polygons, and so on. Most applications also only allow you to make rectangles have rounded corners — and might even provide another separate tool for that.

By selecting the shape tool in *Vantage* and clicking with Adjust, the program will shuffle through the various shape options. Dragging the corner of any drawn shape with Adjust will round the corners, and pressing + or - on the keyboard will alter the number of polygon sides or star points (even if rounded). Dragging an 'origin' onto the page from the toolbar persists across any subsequent object resizing or rotation, and multiple object can be set to rotate or resize independently, or treated as if grouped.

In this way, *Vantage* allows for a very smooth, speedy workflow. But the initial learning curve is steep, and Cerilica will need to ensure the program's manual is comprehensive without being monolithic. The pre-release manual, which has been updated every step of the way since pre-release copies first became generally available, bodes well in this regard, but mustn't underestimate the size of the task.

Vantage is hard to learn, especially for someone very used to the *ArtWorks* way of doing things — which in most cases is pretty much the exact opposite of how Vantage does them.

The path tool extends this flexibility in a dramatic way. As with the shape tool, clicking Adjust before drawing anything flicks through the line options: straight, curved and freehand, together with a *node select* option I'll discuss in a moment.

Beginning to draw with either of the first two seems initially identical: *Vantage*'s straight lines have bezier control handles anyway (so adding a curve to a straight line simply involved bending it), and *Vantage* doesn't alter the curve of a path section once you've moved onto the next, unlike *Draw*.

In fact, unless you press the S key

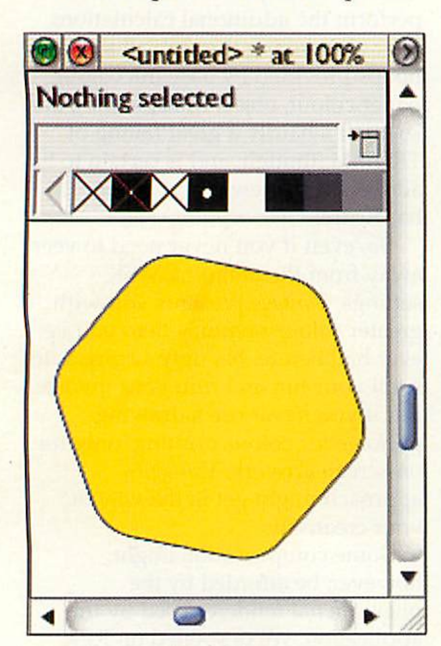


Figure V: Yellow ink on white paper

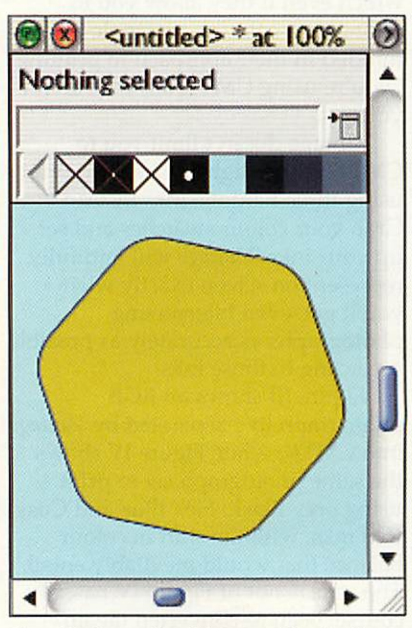


Figure VI: Same yellow ink, but on blue-tinted paper

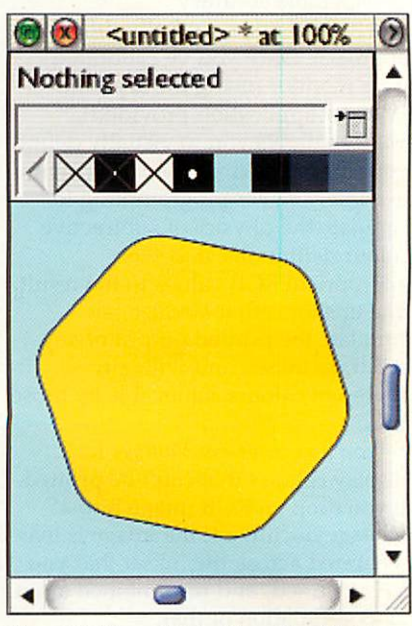
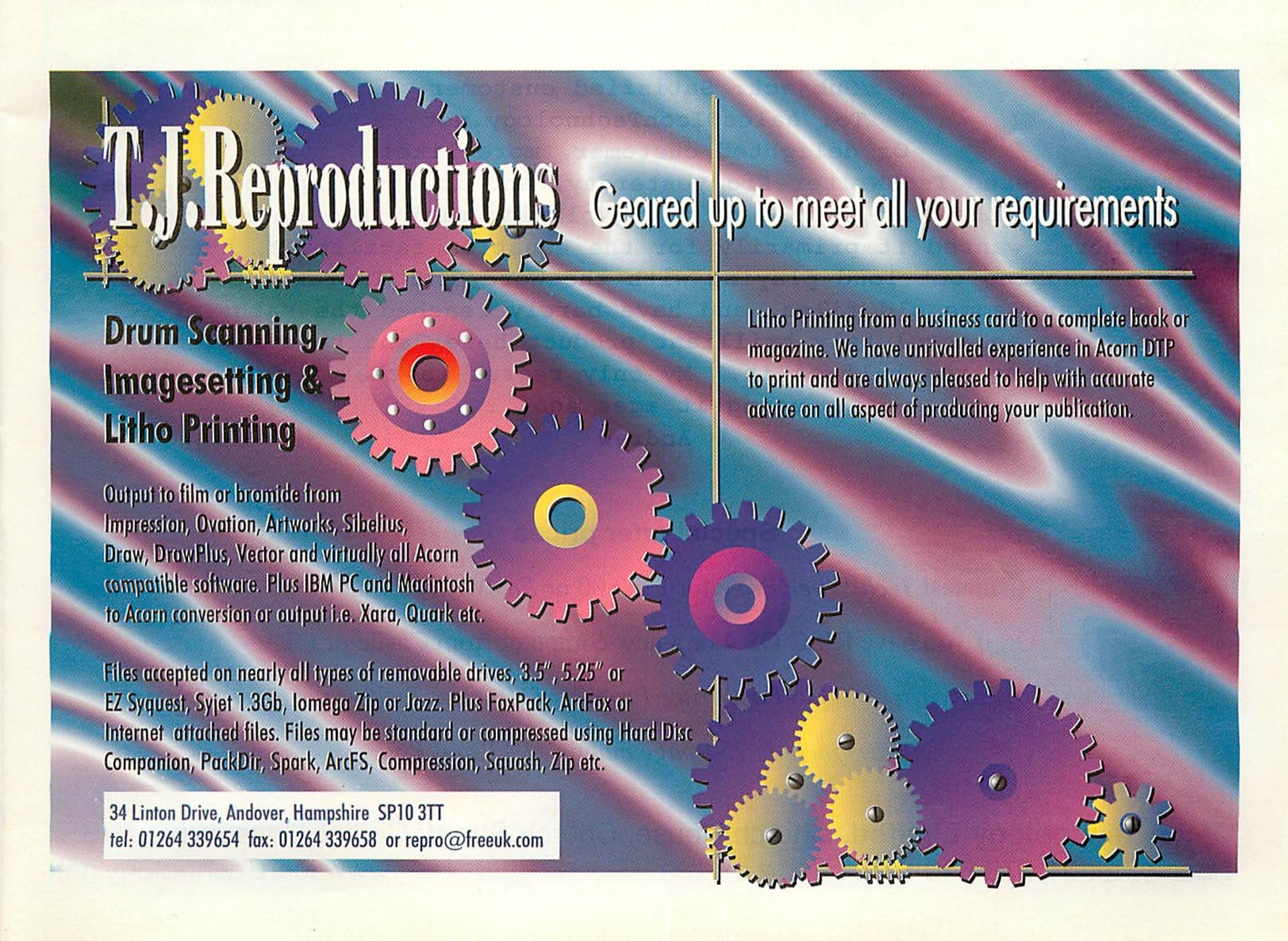


Figure VII: The results of setting yellow ink to be 100% opaque



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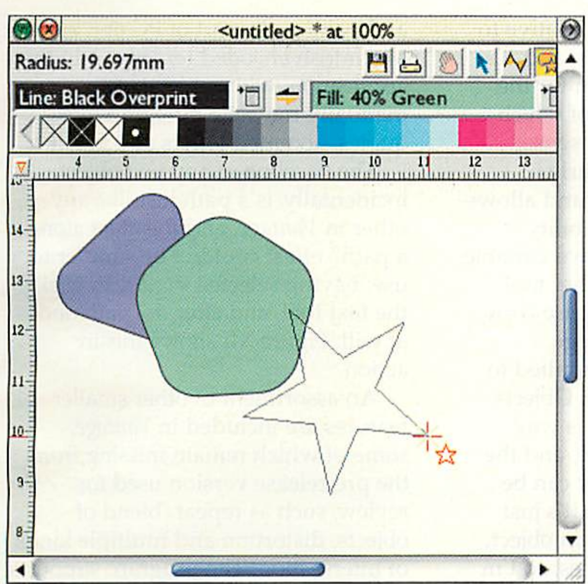


Figure VIII: Using the shape tool to draw a star immediately after a rounded triangle, and a rounded polygon

(to smooth the nodes), drawing curved lines in Vantage is *exactly* like drawing straight ones. For me, this is merely a niggle, as I don't believe I've ever left a curved line completely alone after drawing it anyway, but does make the initial drawing experience somewhat less liquid than might be hoped for.

Drawing in freehand mode, however, is a rather different experience. Some designers are freehand people, others aren't, and I know of one or two professional designers using RISC OS that have barely touched the freehand tool in ArtWorks at all. It's hard to say whether Vantage's freehand path mode will be more appealing, but as a freehand kind of designer myself, I can vouch that it removes some gripes about at least *ArtWorks'* approach.

In *ArtWorks'* freehand, you set your level of opacity, draw, let go, and the program calculates the best fit to the path you've drawn and presents you with it as a *fait accompli*. *Vantage* calculates the path while you draw, giving the added benefit that letting go of the mouse button doesn't end the process, and can provide easy, sharp corners to a freehand path. It also makes it very straightforward to stop freehand, draw a straight line, and then to return to freehand again all as part of the same path and the same movement.

In *Vantage*, freehand accuracy becomes a factor of mouse speed: the slower you move, the greater the accuracy. The downside to all this is that *Vantage*'s freehand paths aren't always as gentle as their 0-accuracy ArtWorks counterparts unless you sketch your line *very* quickly.

A feature promised for later releases, however, should relieve this somewhat: the ability to smooth a line dynamically once it's already been drawn, and (fascinatingly) to also make a line rougher as well. For the time being though, at least, your use of freehand in *Vantage* probably depends just as much on your drawing style as it did in *ArtWorks*. Just in different ways.

The node select mode in the path tool is the real work of art here, though. This allows nodes within a path to be aligned, justified, deleted and so on, in just the same way as objects. Select a path segment and the H key forces it to be perfectly horizontal, V forces vertical. Selecting a node, or a cluster of nodes, and pressing S smooths the joins.

Dragging over part of the object in this mode will select all the nodes within the drag. Other functions are available from the pop-up window that appears from the path tool button. Again, learning the approach taken here can be a significant hurdle. But it's one which, once achieved, allows for tremendous gains in workflow speed and flexibility.

Fills, frills and fonts

The fill tool contains some of the most powerful effects achievable by the program. A radial fill, for example, is simply a sequence of concentric circles bounded by the edges of the object which you're filling. *Vantage* treats the trajectory of the fill as a fully-fledged path, meaning that nodes can be added, altering the acceleration of the fill, as in Figure IX. After the final release, Cerilica plan to allow each node to have a different colour, allowing for multi-stage fills.

The sections of the path can also be curved, which isn't useful for traditional radial fills, as the results can't be seen. But squash a radially-filled object and the fill squashes also — instead of a series of concentric circles, the fill is now a series of concentric ellipses: radial fills in *Vantage* can be of any shape. Producing a fill made from a rounded star shows the results of curving the fill path best: the object rotates along the fill path, which can produce some beautifully subtle effects (Figure X).

The user interface for creating these kinds of fill is extremely awkward, however, requiring an object to be placed relative to the origin of the page, cut to the clipboard, and then taken from the clipboard back again as a fill. To an extent, this makes perfect sense, and allows for the many variations in fill object properties the program supports, but as an example of an

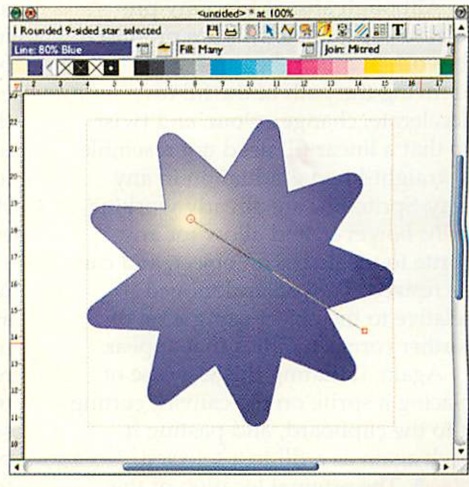


Figure IX: Altering the acceleration of a radial fill

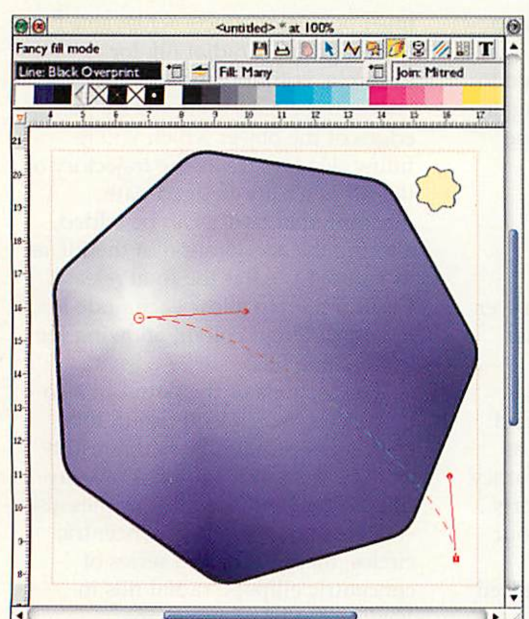


Figure X: A custom radial fill with a curved trajectory, and the shape used to produce the fill

intuitive user-interface frankly, it sucks.

It's also quite possible to ask too much of the fill path, twisting it in ways for which the maths behind the effect just won't work, and the program presents an error window and scrolls up to "safe" mode, with just the toolbar visible. A quick undo returns *Vantage* to usability again, but a smoother way of dealing with these situations would add considerably to the polish of the application.

Although absent from my pre-release copy, linear fills are promised to work in much the same way, allowing the path of the fill to accelerate, change colour, and twist so that a linear fill need not resemble a straight-lined graduation in any way. Sprite fills are already working fully, however, and allow for any sprite to tile across an object, and can be resized, skewed and moved relative to the object using a set of further corner handles that appear.

Again, initiating this is a case of placing a sprite on the canvas, cutting it to the clipboard, and pasting it back again as a fill to a selected object. The original location of the sprite on the canvas is used as the origin for the sprite relative to the object it now fills, and provides the location for the corner handles. All of which again makes perfect sense, albeit in a spectacularly unintuitive fashion, and allows for tremendous flexibility.

Any object can have variable opacity, using a further tool which in my pre-release copy allows for a percentage transparency to be applied to an object as a whole. Objects made transparent this way remain fully editable, and the level of transparency can be altered at any point: it's just another attribute of an object.

Subsequent releases, so I'm told, will take this a stage further and allow for transparencies to be applied to objects in *exactly* the same way as fancy fills currently can be, allowing for linear and radial graduations in opacity, together with sprite-based textured masking. Like Carol Vorderman in a kebab shop, I just can't wait.

Similarly, text areas are limited to single lines in the current version, although full text area handling is firmly on the roadmap, and will utilise a second potentially ground-breaking technology from Cerilica: *FontX*, which allows a smooth and intelligent translation between different font encodings to the extent that the system can supply the upper-case equivalent of a lower-case accented letter in a character set which it's never even seen before.

I don't pretend to understand how this works, and the subject could use a fuller explanation than is realistically possible in a review of a drawing program, so I'll suffice it to say that the principle use of this technology in this context would be to allow the simple and painless import of PC or Macintosh encoded text files into the application, without having to manually translate typographers' quotes, accented letters and the like.

The baseline of any text object, incidentally, is a path just like any other in *Vantage*, and the "text along a path" effect couldn't be simpler to use: having selected your text, click the text tool, and alter the path nodes at will. Figure XII shows this in action.

An assortment of other smaller features are included in *Vantage*, some of which remain missing from the pre-release version used for review, such as repeat/blend of objects, distortion and multiple kinds of intersection. The program supports many kinds of grid, which can be angled and spaced in any way, together with straightforward and intuitive guideline controls.

A variety of preset paper sizes are available, and the program is multi-page capable already. *Vantage* is aware of pretty much any measurement unit you care to throw

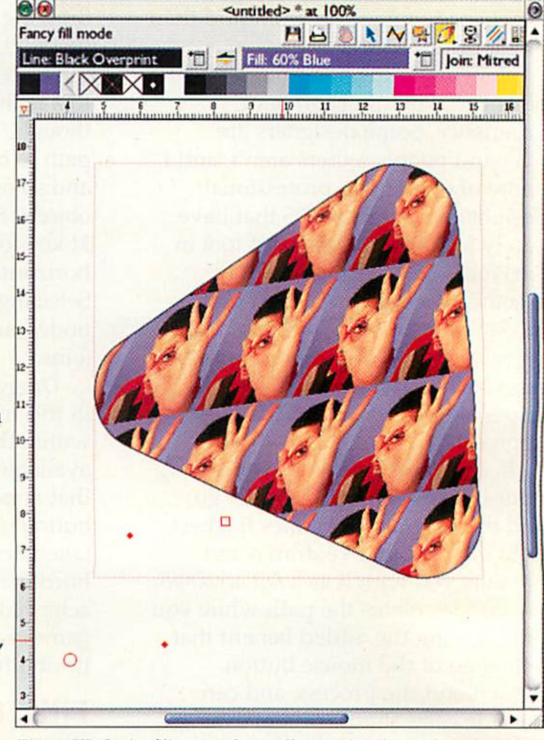


Figure XI: Sprite fills, note the small control nodes to the bottom-left

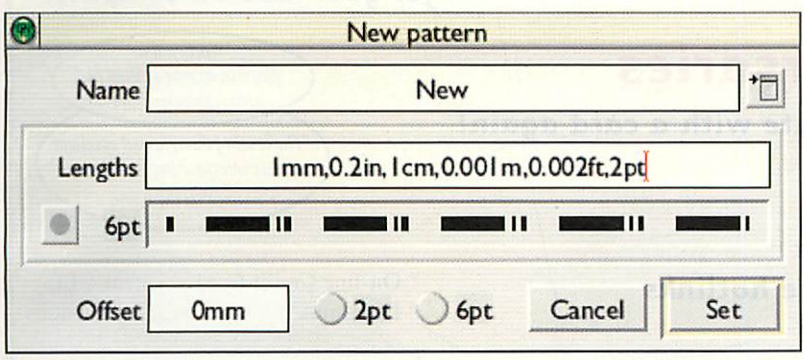


Figure XIII: Creating a custom dash pattern, notice the mixing of measurement units

at it, so creating a custom dash pattern is as simple Figure XIII indicates.

Beyond the canvas

It's not enough that within *Vantage*'s own environment, all of these effects (and more I don't have room to mention) are available, to be useful for real-world graphics production, the application must be able to save in a variety of formats.

It's still not perfect, but *Vantage*'s EPS export is better than most available for RISC OS, and includes the bitmap preview so important for layout work in DTP applications such as *Pagemaker* or *Quark*. Furthermore, *Vantage* can export perfectly in CMYK Sprite and TIFF formats, together with featuring a comprehensive PNG export routine.

Vantage's extended drawfile format uses Acorn's tagging specification, so that all applications that support basic drawfiles will be able to handle *Vantage* files to some extent. But Cerilica plan to release a freeware drawfile renderer to replace the standard RISC OS system one, meaning that all applications that use the native drawfile renderer will suddenly be able to render all *Vantage* object structures in full — although quite how an application like *Ovation Pro* would handle semi-transparent fills in a transparent frame remains to be resolved. Sadly, this doesn't extend to the *Impression* family which uses Computer Concepts' own drawfile rendering routines, and so can't make use of any *Vantage* extensions at all.

In some ways, *Vantage* is simply too clever for its own good. The things that it was designed for, it does with an effortlessness unrivalled in any other drawing application on any other platform. The things that it does badly are, by and large, sufficiently esoteric that you'd be hard-pressed even to find them in any other drawing application on any other platform. And the things that it doesn't do at all it probably will, in time.

Its unwavering focus on design for professional colour printing is something of a jolt from the history other RISC OS applications, where even *Ovation Pro* lacked colour print capabilities for quite some time after release. It's a focus, bordering on obsession, that may irritate some and be a lifeline to others, but is nonetheless *the* most important new technology developed using RISC OS since *Sibelius*.

And given that the rest of *Vantage*, despite a handful of obstinate bugs and a smattering of user interface freakishness, is phenomenally powerful and, once finally learned, pleasurable to use, the "killer app" hype is pretty much justified after all — even after three years. END

Product details

Product:	Cerilica Vantage
Supplier:	Cerilica Limited
Price:	£241.50 (UK, including VAT)
Address:	PO Box 40, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR9 7WH
Tel:	0870 2411731
E-mail:	cerilica@cerilica.com
WWW:	www.cerilica.com

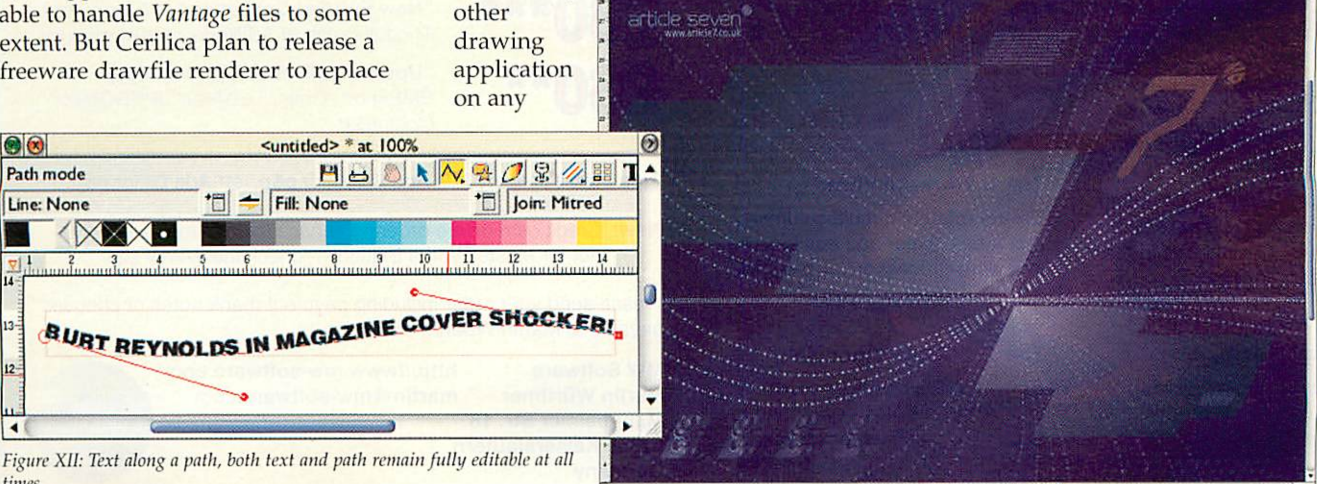


Figure XIV: A desktop backdrop created entirely in Vantage, using many layers of transparency, custom dash patterns, sprite contones and customised radial fills

Figure XII: Text along a path, both text and path remain fully editable at all times

Wakey! Wakey!

Brian O'Carroll's A to Z of the Wakefield experience

A is for Arrival: mine was three and a half hours late, missing the initial fevered Saturday morning rush. This tardiness was not deliberate — I'd been moonlighting until 3:00am putting the Marillion tour back in the truck and I chose sleeping late in my bed over sleeping at the wheel of my car. Better late than never.

Normally I wouldn't go to the Wakefield show at all, it's 130 mile trip for me, and at the end of it I just get to see a very similar set of exhibitors as were at the Epsom show in October.

But there are differences: Six months difference. The RISC OS world changes in interesting ways over a short time and I was pleased to be seeing the new and interesting wonders of the platform. A user show is the best place to go to see new things: the 'try before you buy' option is hard to duplicate anywhere else. Two developments I was pleased to be able to sample IRL (in real life) were the RISC OS compatible 'Pocket Reader' on the CJE stand and the 'Speak' software from Jon Duddington.

Between the sheets

Clare's demonstrated a spreadsheet hopping between Excel on a PC and Schema on RISC OS using HTML as a common format. The HTML coding is actually implemented in XML and, importantly, preserves formulas and most formatting, not just the values seen on a sheet.

Capture in the write

The Pocket Reader, manufactured by Siemens, is a chunky pen with a small wheel and a nib of transparent plastic. When wheeled along a line of printed text the nib lights up in red and, a moment after scanning the line, the text line appears in the one-line LCD screen on the side of the unit.

This is not the scanned image — this is the post processed text, as if typed. It takes a little skill to use, and the character recognition is not perfect, but I managed to get useful results after just a minute's continuous practice at the CJE stand. Results seem to compare equally with *Sleuth3* but the two products have different uses.

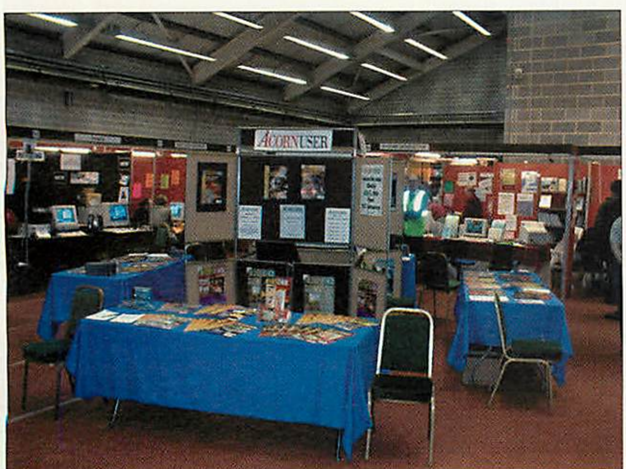
Pocket Reader is a self-contained device which can capture, for example, a useful quote from a newspaper on a train. The captured text can straight away be read back on the pen's one-line screen, and later uploaded to a RISC OS machine using the software and serial lead available from CJE.

Scanning a large amount of printed text using the Pocket Reader is faster than typing it and its speed of use could even compare favourably with flatbed scanning and OCRing, although it's a lot more work for the user.

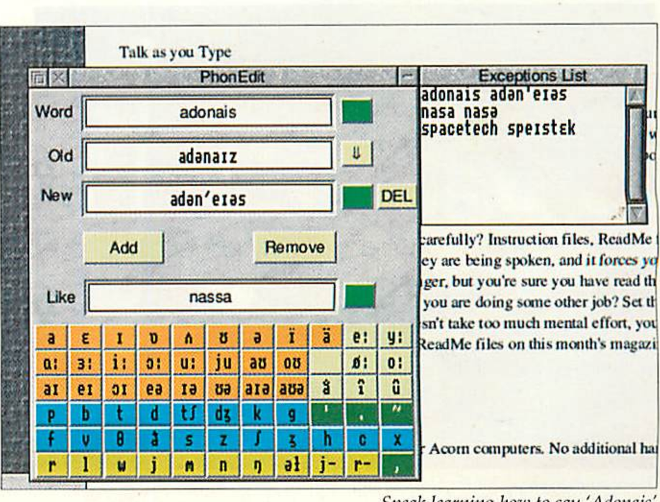
Voice of the OS

Where Pocket Reader gives your RISC OS an eye for print, Speak gives it a mouth for speech. I approached Jon's stand with low expectations given to me by Superior Software's 'Speech' software. Speak's synthesised voice, on the other hand, sounds nowhere near as irritating.

It's not quite as silky smooth as Douglas Rain (HAL, from 2001), but the speech produced flows well, intoning in choice of accents (yes, it can sound like a Brummie). Speak

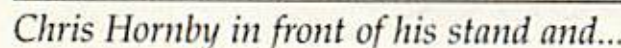


The Acorn User stand before the rush



Speak learning how to say 'Adonais'




Chris Hornby in front of his stand and...



Chris Hornby in front of a fire engine (or is that the other way around?)

can be made to put voice to each word that is typed at the keyboard, or be made to read out a piece of text that is dropped into its window.

While reading such a piece of text a red caret follows on screen: a guide for your eyes to read each word as it is spoken. This is a useful proofreading tool — I have often proofread something only to discover, too late, that I have been reading what I thought was there, not what was actually printed.

Hearing the word, as well as reading it, involves a whole other channel to your brain and, if what you think you've read does not match what you think you've heard, your brain will let you know. Using 'Speak' in this manner will have to be called proofhearing, I suppose.

English is a complicated language though, and the rules for pronouncing it include a great number of exceptions. To cope with this fact of life 'Speak' uses its own dictionary to store pronunciations of words in a standard phonetic form.

While I was at the stand Speak was taught to say 'NASA' (with short a's as we prefer to intone it in England), and 'Adonais' (rhymes with and scans like "come 'n' play this"), a word whose pronunciation has often tripped up professional radio presenters.

Thunder on the highway

Archive Magazine, first in the door on the right, are vendors of a piece of equipment from Grey Electronics that protects your modem from the effects of nearby lightning. I was interested to learn that there is a subtle threat, not from direct strikes, but from spikes induced as charge relocates due to a nearby lighting strike.

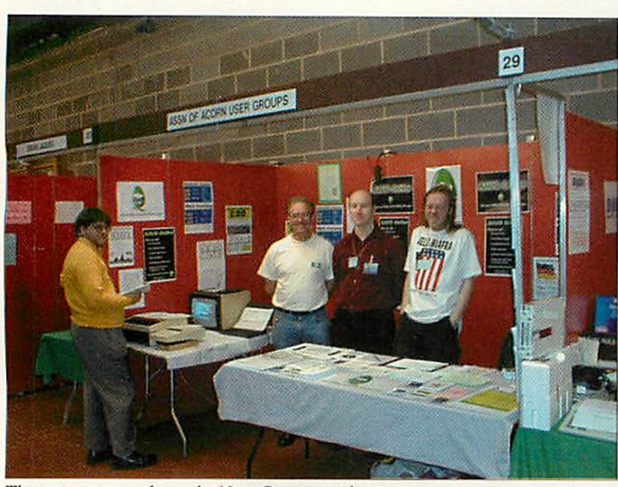
A direct strike to the overhead telephone wire connecting your house to a distribution pole will, by delivering enough electricity to last a large family household for six months, probably fry the electrics in your whole house. This is rare. A more likely event, scarily, is that an induced phone line spike from a nearby lightning strike will zip down underground telephone wiring into your home and execute your modem's electronics.

In one instance, which Paul Beverly related, a local computer shop was bought out of modems in a week by people living in a single street — they'd all had their modems staked through the heart out by one induced spike.

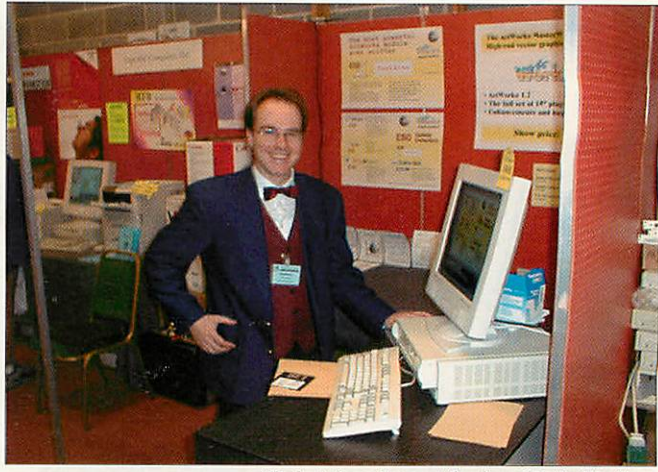
We've had surge protection on our computers' mains supplies for years, now it's the turn of the ubiquitous modem to get a bodyguard, and Paul Beverly is crusading with the kit — and showing how easy it is to wire in a comms surge protector, a box that plugs into your phone socket and your phone/modem then plugs into it. Like a One.Tel box it, also, is intended to save you money.

Playing POSum

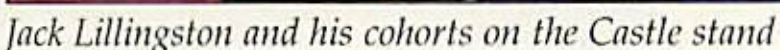
Standing for Point Of Sale... um...., and the subject of a recent feature in



Three strange people on the User Group stand


The best dressed man at the show, Martin Wurthner




Jack Lillingston and his cohorts on the Castle stand



It's big and powerful and that's only the stand

this magazine, these creatures are ripe for being spotted in the high street. On demonstration at Wakefield were bar code readers generating input for RISC OS point of sale software which featured all the things you'd expect — stock control, ordering, facilities for discounting and rental, and tracking of customers complete with the ability to scan membership cards.

Those lovely stalk matrix displays, which can tell you to 'have a nice day' for lack of any other useful information to give at the end of a transaction, were also working. I did once notice a similar Microsoft system in use in PetSmart, and wondered if it ever crashed.

Oregano of the species

Oregano is currently evolving into version two. However, in this survival of the fittest scenario, version two is a completely new piece of software which will only out perform version one once it has grown up. The changeover is being handled by allowing version 2 to be run alongside version 1 until such a time that it can be weaned and used by itself.

The advantage of creating a version 2 is that its base code is common to other non-desktop versions of the browser and support for Java, Flash, and eventually Shockwave, are obstructed purely by licensing for the RISC OS desktop platform, not by a coding problem.

This is good news. We will know from now on that any lack of plug-in support is down to that tricky licensing agreement, and not for a lack of good programming.

Vantage

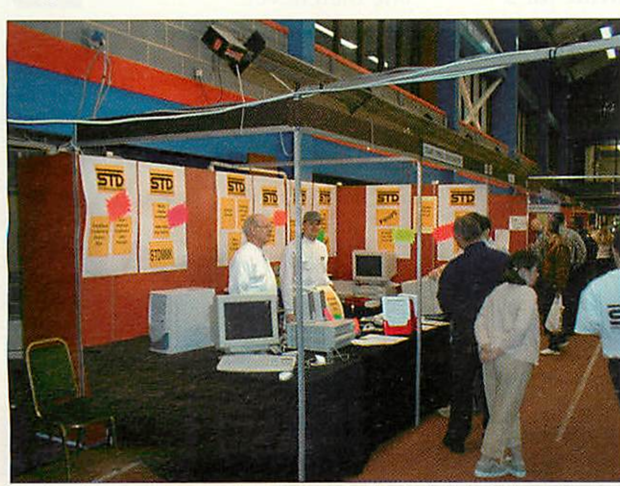
The Cerilica stall was big, with RISC OS machines on — ones that you could use to try out, and have demonstrated, the release version of *Vantage*. Better late than never. Buying the package is a little complicated. I put a deposit down on it in 1999, which puts me ahead of people who have not done so.

But this also places me in a queue behind those who currently have a pre-release version, for which they've already paid full price. Anyway, *Vantage* is officially here now, and along the way has spawned some extras like *Monitor*, *TrueStep* and *DotGain*.

SLYM Pickings

It's funny how things come around — flares from the 60's turned out to be a good investment for the fashion conscious. Computers of the seventies often appeared, like a jump-suit of the silicon world, as all-in-one units — the Hewlett Packard 9845B springs to my mind! This progressed to the beige twin-sets of monitor and computer, the BBC B's with their CUB screens.

Eventually, accessorising arrived and daisy chains of extra boxes (mostly dark blue after some in-depth consumer research) took the desktop by storm. Now, it seems, the simplified system is back in vogue.



Neither of the two on the stand are Stuart Tyrrell – that's half of him on the right



While Neil Farnham-Smith is completely invisible on his stand

The components of the Cumana RISC OS SLYM machine are tucked in around an LCD screen: just keyboard and mouse are external, and the silicon-cycle is almost complete.

Pling Boot Sale

Talking of things becoming fashionable again the second hand and charity goods available at Wakefield were many. These just refuse to stop working. I resisted the temptation to pick up a cheap A3010 just for typing things at work, I'm too busy at work to have time, but these older cheap machines do, in a sense, extend the range of RISC OS machines available since they can do useful simple tasks very reliably.

Pictures at an exhibition

I cannot not mention Photodesk Ltd. Despite the rough ride they've had at the hands of some international white-collar fraudsters their flagship photo-retouching software has stood the test of time and they remain the informed source for RISC OS compatible digital cameras.

Another reason I cannot not mention them is that they lent me the use of a digital camera at the show in order that I could undertake my spur of the moment decision to photograph every stand. After half an hour using a compact Olympus I'm convinced I have to have one, they are very easy to use — although I may need some more experience as a photographer to get the results I need.

Other show-goers were trying out the cameras on the *Photodesk* stand and I'm sure they too found, once they'd released the virtual shutter a few times, that the digital camera is a comfortable item to use. It's surely one of those items you have to hold in your hand to know it's what you actually want, and a user show is a great place to try one out.

Absent friends

One stand I was unable to photograph was RISC OS Ltd — they were intentionally absent. This has created a lot of 'talk'. Prior to the show RISC OS announced their new 'Select' scheme. Customers who join 'Select' will receive regular RISC OS updates for a yearly fee, in the region of £100 — a pioneering practice on any platform, but seen as a little pricey in this case.

Select is going to change the way software is written for RISC OS. The old punctuated equilibrium of large step upgrades will give way to a gradual evolution of the operating system in smaller adaptive steps. It looks like it could cost individuals in our small user base more, but I can see the benefits may be greater and provide for a fitter platform.

The pros and cons of Select have been thoroughly mulled in the Acorn newsgroups. I know some people who deliberately don't read newsgroups on certain topics in order to avoid the prophecies of 'doom and gloom' that rollercoaster through the threads. Before writing this article I lurked on a few Acorn newsgroups to gauge reactions to the Wakefield show.

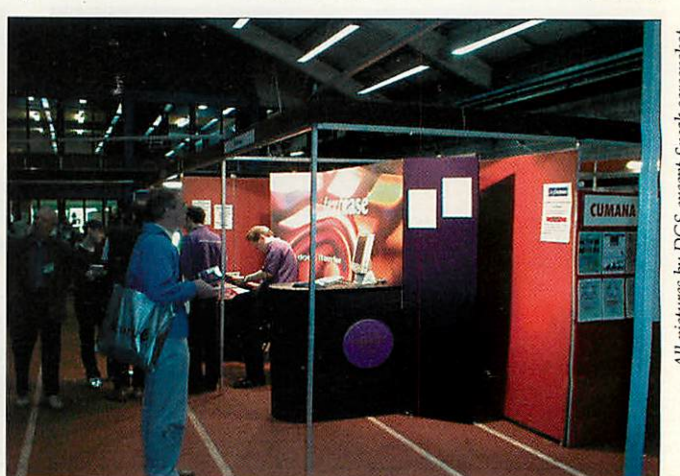
Opinions were quite diverse this year as they usually have been in other years. Some posts concentrated their passions on a detail that was going to either save or ruin the RISC OS platform; Wakefield 2001 was compared with other events like the Epsom show and last year's Wakefield show; the strength of the RISC OS market was gauged using the show with many different dipsticks, from the size and quantity of the stands to the crowdedness of the aisles.

Z is for Omega

And finally, yes, it was there, and it is still causing birth pangs for MicroDigital. As I was so late arriving I couldn't spare the time to look at the demonstration machines, release dates for which have been knocked around by chip supply problems. We are assured that this machine will come to market, eventually. Better late than never. END



Dave Walker is not in this picture but these are (very) early Acorn machines



Softease were demonstrating their super-duper TextEase Presenter

All pictures by DGS except Speak screenshot

Environmental

Nowadays, there is little doubt that the Earth is in crisis: global warming, ozone depletion, poverty, pollution, mass extinction of once-common species, are just some of the problems we face.

Perhaps then the most important message to mankind that came out of the 20th century, were the solutions to this crisis and the challenges humanity face in the dawn of a new millennium.

These solutions were delivered at the United Nations, Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil in 1992 and endorsed by over 170 world governments who pledged support for a unified agenda of action called Agenda 21

Agenda 21

The vision of Agenda 21 cannot be delivered without the involvement at a local level from every community in the world. In his Millennium address to the United Nations Kofi Annan stated that:

"We may be at the dawn of a new Millennium, but the environmental problems we face are painfully familiar. They may even be getting worse."

Despite the Earth Summit, and despite success stories like the Montreal Protocol to protect the Ozone Layer, human beings continue to plunder the global environment. Unsustainable practices remain deeply embedded in the fabric of our daily lives.

We are failing to protect resources and eco-systems. We are failing to invest enough in alternative technologies, especially for energy. We are failing even to keep the debate alive.



These are deeply troubling trends for which we recommend four priorities for reversing them:

• We need a major public education effort. Understanding of the challenges we face is alarmingly low. Corporations and consumers alike need to recognize that their choices can have significant consequences. Schools and civil society groups have a crucial role to play;

• Environmental issues must be fundamentally repositioned in the policy-making arena. The environment must become better integrated into mainstream economic policy, and the surest way is through green accounting;

• Governments must not only create environmental agreements, they must enforce them. They can, for example, cut the subsidies that sustain environmentally harmful activities each and every year. They can also devise more environment-friendly incentives for markets to respond to;

• We need sound scientific information. This is the only basis for effective policy, yet large gaps in our knowledge remain. Technological breakthroughs that are unimaginable today may well solve some of the environmental challenges we face, but it would be foolish to count on them and to continue with business as usual.

The 55th General Assembly session decided in December 2000 that the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, would serve as a ten-year global review on the progress of Agenda 21 and the implementation of the concepts and applications of sustainable development assessing mankind's environmental footprint.

Communities all have an environmental footprint — water, food, housing, resources and energy are all required to sustain life. As defined in Agenda 21, all communities across the world are made up of various stakeholder groups, clearly showing that we all have a stake in the future. We as individuals fall into one of these groups and have the right and the responsibility to participate in our local Agenda 21 process.

In 1997 Tony Blair stated "I want all local authorities in the UK to adopt local Agenda 21 strategies by the year 2000". The following are excerpts of the Prime Minister's speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs on the 6th March 2001:

"The evidence grows daily all around us of the dangers of indifference to our duty to treat nature with respect and care for our environment. Britain's task over the coming years is to argue that case at every level of society; to make Britain a showcase for it, and to provide leadership internationally for it and to match the action with the words.

"We have begun our preparations for Rio+10. Departments across government are already working to engage business and NGO's and high-level buy-in will be the key. To help boost this process, between now and Rio+10 next year *I will be* inviting CEOs from key sectors such as water, energy, tourism, finance and forestry, together with the leaders of NGO's to work to develop innovative strategies in these areas to promote sustainability. Britain on its own cannot do it, but we can set a standard at home and provide leadership abroad. It is our responsibility and I believe we can discharge it."

Planetary Initiatives, a not-for-profit



issues

John Booth of Planetary Initiatives reports on RISC OS and the eco-footprint

organisation, was incorporated in 1997 to research the promotion of Agenda 21 and sustainable development on a community level, within the United Kingdom, making a study of the implementation and the process of introduction of Agenda 21 into the local community of Southend-on-Sea and the 14 other Boroughs within Essex.

Once the consultation process began in Southend-on-Sea it also became apparent that nominal funding would result in only a few percent of the population gaining real knowledge of the global Agenda 21 initiative. This pattern has been repeated in the majority of communities across the United Kingdom.

Not to be deterred from our objectives, our research turned towards the solutions to our findings. This research over a three-year period resulted in the creation of *Project Planeteye*, a new concept Web site backed up with intensive educational outreach, advertising and a marketing programme that in time could give cost effective access to a whole community, and act as a template for other communities.

The key to its success required authority and involvement at four distinct levels, international, national, regional and local. This support needs to take the form of educational content directed at the initiatives and solutions in how to do your bit for the planet, by those already engaged and committed towards sustainability.

The Internet highway is the fastest growing form of multi–media education in the world. It has the potential to connect individuals and communities across our globe in the solutions to living in the 21st century. *Project Planeteye* will provide you with all you need to know about what stakeholder initiatives exist within your community, or give you the insight to start your own

Such a Web site built on co-operative partnerships can build a community base giving an unprecedented audience for those engaged in such products and services. Equitable sponsorship and sustainable advertising at competitive rates at all four levels can be redirected to sustain education and support for Local Agenda 21. We believe this project can give progress and hope to all those working towards a sustainable future for all.

Best business practice

Businesses are aware of the changing tide of consumerism generated by a planetary concern for our future. One purpose of *Planeteye* is to inform business managers of changing legislation, and current 'best practice' offered by government departments, industry and other bodies.

Karl-Henrick Robert, chairman of the Natural Step in Sweden declared that: "Industries must move from defending themselves to being heroes, ahead of everyone else, fighting for tomorrow's market and tomorrow's technology. In ten years the market will be about nothing else but sustainability."

John Booth, Director of *Planetary Initiatives*, introduced *Project Planeteye* to the United Nations office of UNED UK on March 6, 2001. Despite the development of the site still being in its early stages, the UNED team urged *Planetary Initiatives* to introduce this new concept Web site to its forum delegates conference on UK preparations for the Earth Summit 2002: The National and Global Dimensions, hosted at the London School of Economics on March 20, 2001.

UNED Forum is an international multi-stakeholder organisation, committed to the promotion of global sustainable development. Based in London, UNED's activities support the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

With very little time to prepare for this conference we were very grateful for the support given by Arcania, RiscStation and ExpLAN in presenting this project to the conference delegates.

The Director of RiscStation, Roy Heslop, volunteered his time to help introduce *Project Planeteye* on a RiscStation network supplied for the conference. Paul Richardson from ExpLAN was also on hand to demonstrate his solar-powered prototype computer, the Solo, and discuss the transfer of such technology for manufacture in African States.

The Solo prototype on display at the Conference uses a meagre 17 watts of power including the LCD screen, despite employing a small disc drive unit and using an analogue screen interface, which squanders a further 5 watts.

The final design of Solo will use a digital screen interface and is expected to draw only 8.5watts and include other power-saving refinements. These will permit it to be run from a single 10-watt solar panel, and still leave a little spare to charge a battery.

Arcania were also pleased to have been given the opportunity to

support *Project Planeteye* at the Conference, as our Web site designers they see this project as an essential tool for the implementation of Agenda 21.

They have for many years supported the aims of Agenda 21, being actively engaged in ensuring that their working practices are 'best practice'. This is possible due to the exceptionally low power consumption and high efficiency of their RISC OS technology, coupled with the security offered by the incorruptibility of the comprehensive RISC OS operating system which utilises such a small footprint.

Many Web design and IT companies were approached for this project but the majority of them only saw the £-signs — Arcania saw the point.

As our Web designers and IT consultants they have recently upgraded their solar panel array so that in combination with their wind turbine they can ensure that *Project Planeteye* is "solar-published" on to the World-wide Web. They are currently involved in pursuing the solutions required to become one of the first UK businesses to reach at least 10% of energy consumed being from renewable resources.

Arcania enthusiastically support the Bush Internet TV box which is an excellent example of a RISC OS/ARM combination which renders the Internet on any television and consumes a mere 6W in the process.

Our search for a renewable energy powered server continues in an effort to lessen our environmental impact and make the project truly sustainable.

We took great pleasure in inviting RiscStation to provide the IT network which consisted of six computers, each consuming under 10 watts of power.



This is what RiscStation had to say:

"Agenda 21 represents a global initiative that concerns us all. Here at RiscStation we fully support Agenda 21 and take very seriously the sustainability implications for Information Technology. Information Technology may hold a vital key in unlocking and disseminating solutions to living in the 21st century, as the potential of *Project Planeteye* demonstrates.

"However, with present Global Warming levels and climate change already hitting the UK, energy consumption through IT must be a factor that should concern both providers and customers. As a growth industry in the early part of this millennium we must address and improve upon our energy consumption and efficiency.

"Using current popular technology we are already seeing an ever-increasing demand for more power to be generated. As technology is developing and computers grow faster and more capable so too does the need to use more and more energy in order to satisfy their needs. The fundamental principal behind RiscStation computers is simplicity. The vast majority of times computers are used, a simple, low-powered computer would be more than adequate to do the job.

"When the prototype RiscStation computers were being tested the engineers found that the power consumption of the mother board was so low that they could run one on just 3AA-sized batteries, that's little more than most TV remote controls. A RiscStation computer (complete with hard drive and CD ROM drive) under normal circumstances can be powered using no more than 60watts, the wattage of the average household lightbulb.

"Alone these figures might sound reasonably impressive, but multiply them by a dozen in a school classroom, or a hundred in an office, and then multiply by the number of schools and offices in a town or city, and then by all the cities and countries and the power consumption really mounts up.

"In California at the moment the authorities are encountering serious difficulties trying to provide the level of electrical power demanded by the culture surrounding and incorporating Silicon Valley. A single graphics/sound card in a PC can consume about the same amount of energy as the whole of a RiscStation computer."

As can be seen from those companies utilising the RISC OS platform, the sustainable aspects to this technology cover some of the main concepts of sustainable development. *Project Planeteye* needs to know more about this technology so *Planetary Initiatives* has commissioned Arcania to carry out more in depth research into this platform, this is currently ongoing.

The clock is ticking and we have set ourselves ambitious targets, the first of which is to collate as much data as we can in the run up to Earth Summit 2002 to make this data available to the delegates. Beyond 2002 the concepts of *Project Planeteye* will endeavour to create a sustainability channel to provide the inspiration to communities to embrace the challenges we face in the coming decades.

We are dependent on the support of stakeholder groups everywhere to provide us with their contributions to this project and to show their support for this global initiative that effects us all and the generations yet to come. *Planeteye* is one of the first Web sites to engage in sustainable advertising on an ethical and equitable basis offering companies large and small the opportunity to share their solutions with the public and to express their sustainability profile, something consumers are demanding more and more as our environmental crisis deepens.

We have welcomed this opportunity to share this project with the RISC OS community. The project appeal for educational advertising and funding was launched on World Environment Day in Essex on June the 5th and the first steps have been taken. One could perceive the project as one massive jigsaw puzzle that only with participation, will the bigger picture unfold.

Visit **www.projectplaneteye.org** and get onboard.



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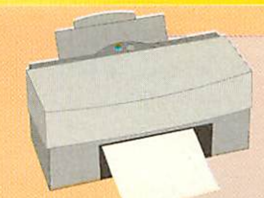
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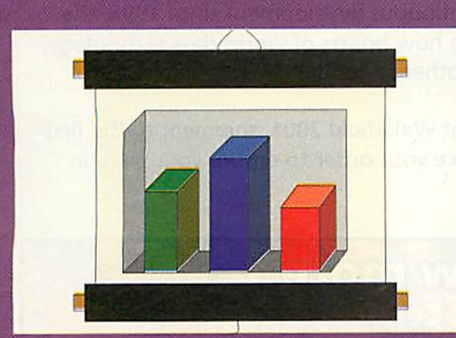
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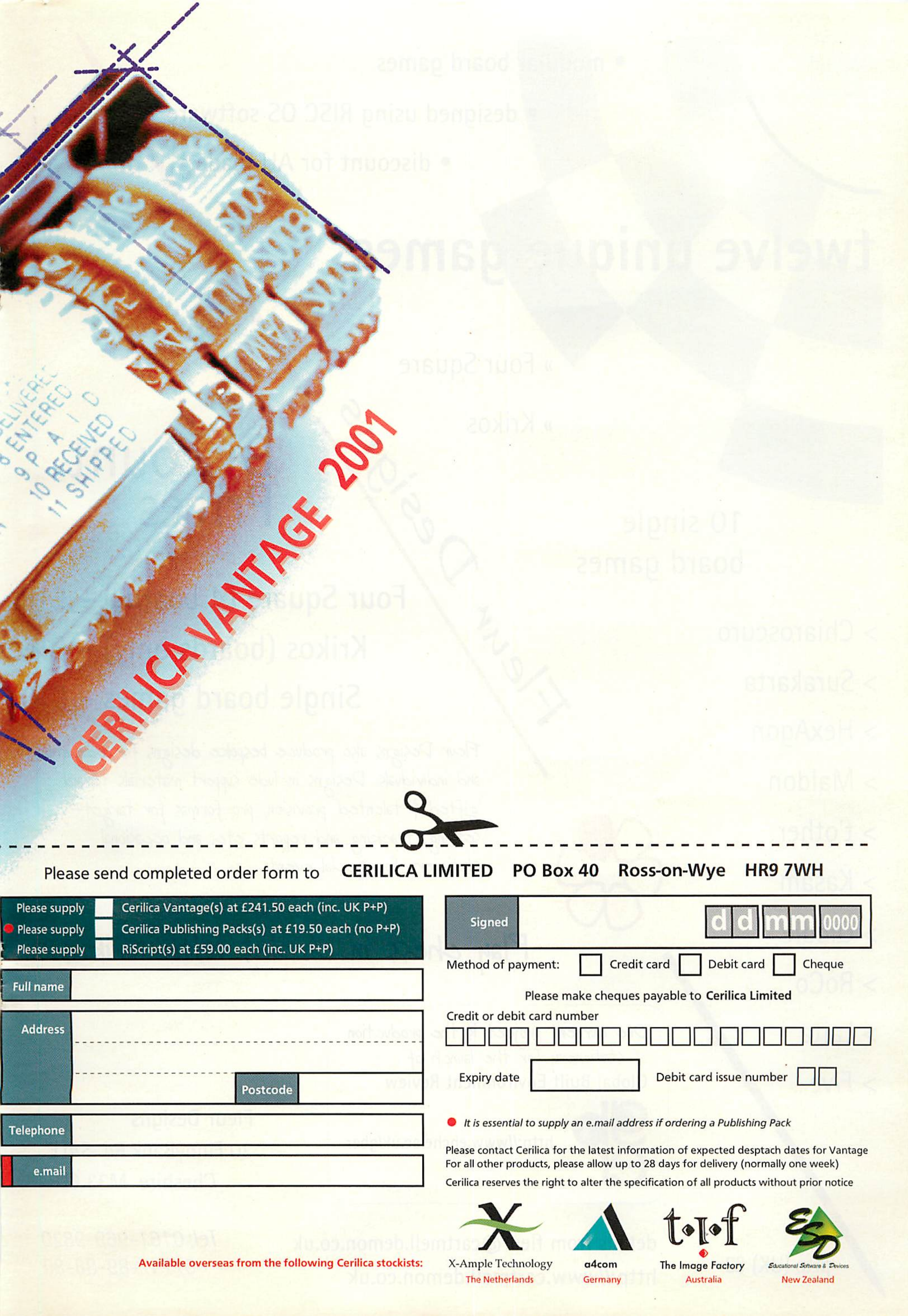


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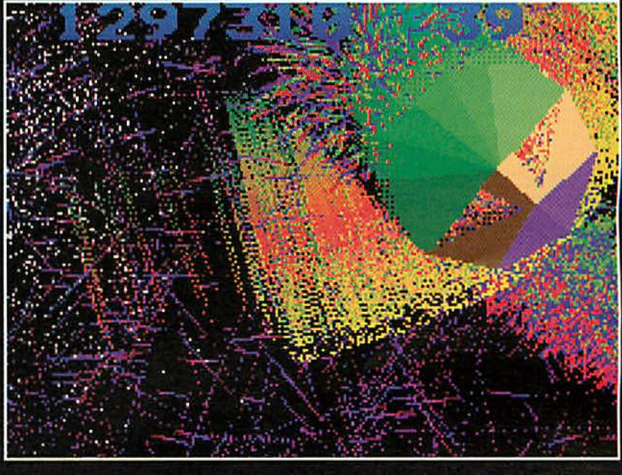
Pam Turnbull has a little fun

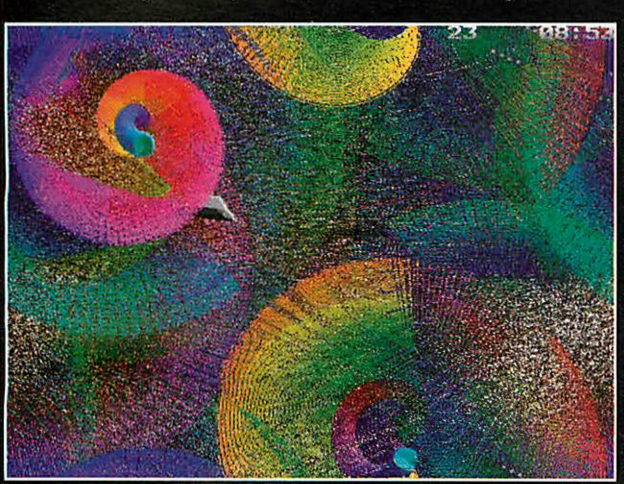
If you've never felt that the universe was against you then you've never played *Spheres of Chaos*! Now in version 2.04 thanks to Ian McLeod, this takes the simplest of game concepts and runs with it.

As luck would have it I recently came across an old copy of *Meteors* and was reminiscing on near misses, when *Spheres* landed on my desk. In its initial launch there was a nice reason for the madness, but in essence this is a game of kill or be killed.

Set in space you are in control of an arrow-shaped ship starting off centre screen for a perpetual battle of stand-off with the universe moving around you. Alternatively you can opt to move around your universe in search of trouble. You know you're going to be destroyed it's just a matter of how many can you take out before the inevitable happens.

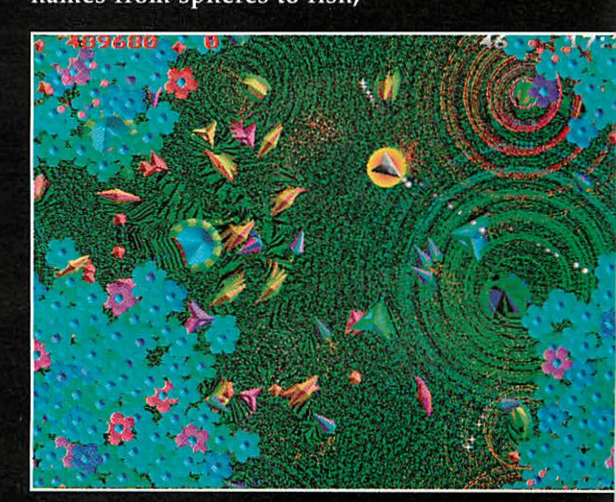
What makes the game special plus incredibly, and annoyingly, addictive are those little extras... There are the normal — control by keyboard, mouse or joystick. And then there's the special: Definitely into the latter category comes the *difficulty* menu. Forget opting for a level and getting down to the nitty gritty, here you need to spend some time setting these variables which will make every game and every player unique.

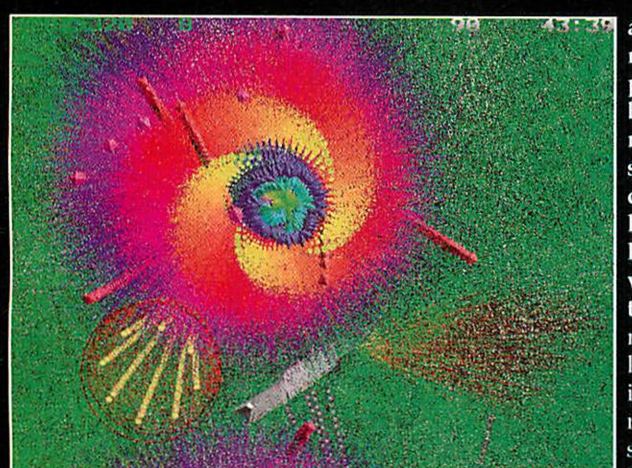




Once you've set the overall difficulty to very easy, easy, normal, hard or silly, you then need to set the chance of collectables appearing on screen - whoops and I'd be shooting everything in sight. Set as a percentage you can increase/decrease this in tenths by using left and right-hand mouse buttons. Next comes the aliens.

Apparently there are 14 types of common aliens each of which has to be set individually; few, normal, lots, hordes or none. These opponents boast unusual names from spheres to fish,





a couple of e-mails may be shot to pieces. To put it bluntly you can make this game as simple or as difficult as you like. If you don't like wasting valuable game-time, *auto difficulty* means that each level you start with is the same as the number of spare ships you have. Good for newbies as if you do badly the game gets easier - just don't expect a high score!

I like programs that don't take themselves too seriously and the setting options alone lets you know that this should be fun. The vision options give the hint that this should be colourful at the very least offering strobe and/on single flashes, sprite stippling, colour variation and cycling. It didn't let me down.

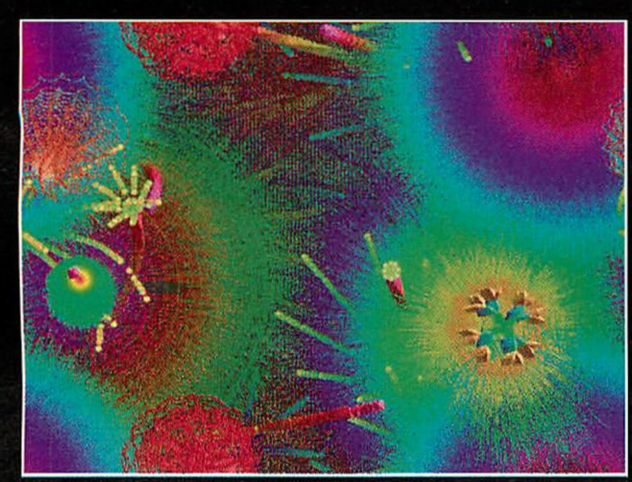
With the options chosen and the tension mounting I launched into the game. Big round spheres headed towards my central port. I pressed a button and they disappeared, but now a flashing triangle is heading towards me, should I be collecting or shooting it? I really should have looked at the *things* menu item! I'll hedge and move, where are the brakes - I think I'll change the gravity setting next time. Wasn't there something in the instruction sheet about an emergency hyperspace jump?

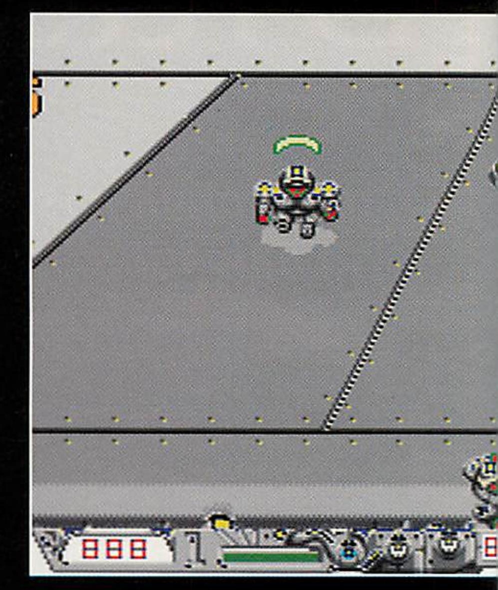
My score is heading up quite nicely now. I've got homing

windup to spikeball. Once done you're on setting the numbers of bugs, black holes, end of level aliens and occasional things. If you're unsure of what these are a line of text at the bottom of the screen tries to help, for instance for bugs you are told these are *little shocking pests*.

Then you can set the variations: game type, shot and ship collisions, race type, bounce off floor and walls, gravity and so on. Sound is not simply on or off either. Instead you can alter the channel, volume, output (between 8- or 16-bit), have it *always annoying* and even checkout the samples for yourself.

Personally I turn the sounds off - otherwise my ruse of reading





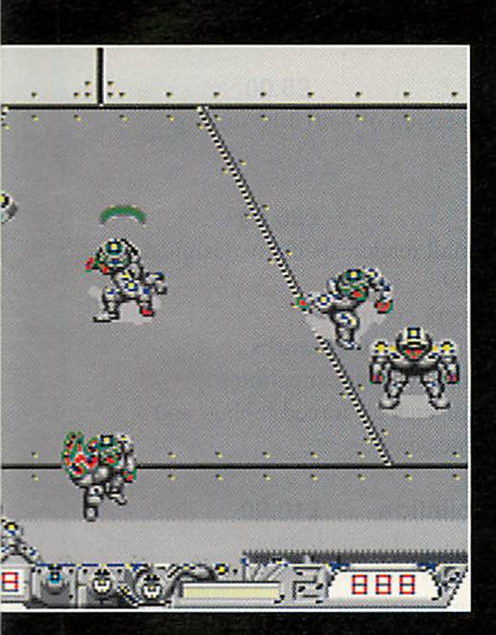
ammunition which augments my bad aim and if I can get the next triangle as well by my calculations I can add increase my fire rate and add a spread effect. No got that one wrong, I've got a zap shield. Ohh a promise of bonus points for the next ship. Now if I can shoot that triangle and then shoot that sweetie-shaped vessel which spawns rather nasty fighters I should be OK.

Did I enjoy playing? Yes. And no, you can't borrow it, buy your own! I really should read the instructions more carefully - the function keys have some very useful facilities ...

Speedball 2

If you are pining for the end of the football season, and think that rugby just doesn't cut the mustard, then take a seat for this Bitmap Brothers' classic.

Set in the future, you are in control of a team ready to play in a knockout or for the cup in 1 or 2-player mode. But before you jump into the arena, watch the *Demo Game* available from the main menu and get a feel for the gameplay and if you dither too



long the computer will make the decision and take you to the demo anyway!

Decide to opt for the *knockout* and you find yourself pitted against the computer. Personally, I'd recommend some training at this stage, but the more impatient may prefer to try their arm straight away. Practise is an game with no opponents so is your chance to hone those shots and passes. Be warned, in a knockout game you face a series of ever-tougher teams and continue playing until you lose. And no saving and coming back for more later on!

If you prefer your matches in small chunks go for the *league*. Here you control *Brutal Deluxe* in Division 2. Each season lasts for 14 weeks with your points for wins, draws and points scored are totted up and quite simply: if you finish on top you're promoted. Finish second and there are the play-offs to endure against the team second from bottom in the First Division.

But for real players there's the *Cup*. A knockout tournament of four rounds. Each round you play one match over two legs. If you draw you play a decider. But if the bench is where you feel at home then the Cup and league sun-menu gives you the option to act as *Team Manager* with the computer controlling the teams on the ground.

Indeed this is really two games in one - playing and managing. The latter allows you to improve your nine players and three subs by buying and selling players and improving their attributes before changing their positions on the field and making substitutions. At the start of the game you have an amount of money in the bank. This screen allows you to select the gym or transfer screens, examine the attributes of *Brutal Deluxe* and their opponents, and make substitutions.

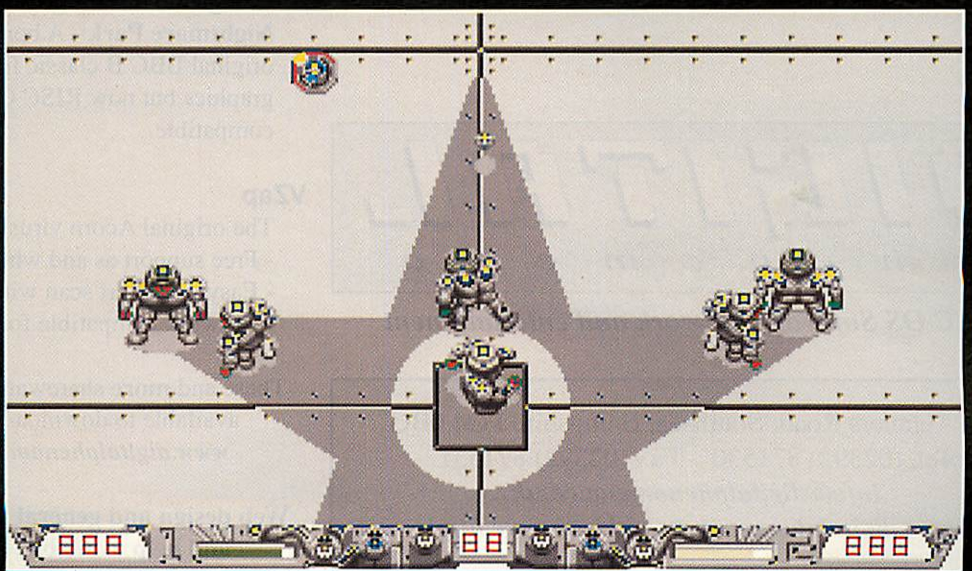
You need to be rather canny at this stage gauging strengths and balancing their needs with your bank balance before deciding on the transfer or gym screens. But this is no ordinary gym as here you can help by adding armour as well as ensuring a permanent improvement for your players such as aggression, attack, defence, speed, throwing, stamina, intelligence or power.

This is vital as players attributes determine their individual strengths during a match. I didn't enjoy this aspect of the game as dry tactics and strategies are not for me and here this is a matter of pressing buttons, rather than seeing the training. Not close enough to the action for my mind. But a necessary evil if you want to win.

On to the match itself them. Each half lasts 90 seconds with teams swapping ends at half time as you'd expect, starting when the ball is launched into play in the centre of the pitch. Although your aim is to score the most - how you do that is totally up to you (so no offside rule to worry about).

Control is quite straightforward and the game helps by showing your colour and a letter outlining the position a player has. The one nearest to the ball each time is your control player. Each member of the team can move and throw the ball in

Continued on page 48



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Sit back, relax

I really enjoyed meeting many of you at Wakefield and putting names to faces (Fleur Designs' customers) and getting feedback on graphics (Acorn User readers). Many of the questions I was asked were similar boiling down to, "How do you get that effect?" and "What software do I need to ...?"

For me, situated next to the Cerilica stand, a highlight of the show was Martin Würthner (producer of many *ArtWorks* modules) being given a demonstration of *Vantage*'s latest capabilities. I don't mind which way the ideas cross-fertilise and the future for RISC OS graphics looks bright.

Having bought or upgraded your graphics programs at Wakefield it's time to show off your skills and the capabilities of the programs. This month we're starting an occasional series that will allow you to exercise your skills — but don't worry if you're not an artist; what we're looking for is examples that show how the programs help you to produce something easily or produce an unexpected but interesting effect.

To set a base-line for the series we have a drawing produced by Tom Beeley. We mentioned Tom in an earlier column as the author of a set of instructional disks for *Draw* and the reason we're starting with a contribution from Tom is that his picture of a Volvo was produced entirely using *Draw* which, together with *Paint*, is the starting point for our evaluation of any graphics program. Those who doubt *Draw*'s capability as a complete graphics program now need to re-evaluate that view.

We're hoping that some of you will send in work that you've produced using other RISC OS graphics packages and — the difference between this and what we've done in the past — explain how the particular program you used help you produce the various effects that you achieved.

Now that RISC OS has a good range of graphics programs that are being actively developed it's time to show off their capabilities. Files produced by any graphics program are welcome but I'm afraid there are no prizes — just the honour of seeing your work on these pages.

Please check first though before sending any large files by e-mail and note that your explanation about why or how you used a particular program is the most important part of the exercise. The files don't need to be of a complete picture — just sufficient to show off the effect in question.



I've just received my copy of *DrawWorks Third Millennium* and it's astounding how much has been packed into a program that simply extends *Draw*. Of course 'simply' is misleading! Although *DrawWorks* uses *Draw* there is so much in the *DrawWorks* program itself that you forget the 'simple' program that's at the base of the package.

New to *DrawWorks* and most attractive at first glance is the object distortion tool. Cleverly, and correctly in my opinion, the tool takes a single object or set of objects into a second window where you can distort it at will before saving it back to the original window. Other small, but welcome, additions are the sets of nudge arrows for a variety of line tools — although I would like to see a counter by each set to show the present state or size and the icon for the line width is surely the wrong way round.

The freehand tool appears to work smoothly — perhaps I could work my way through some of Tom Beeley's more advanced tutorials with that advantage — and the text extraction and manipulation tools may make text areas a useful facility at last.

By the time you read this I hope to have had some time to look at the *ColourBar* applet for ArtWorks, get to grips with the release version of *Vantage*, teach myself to appreciate bit-mapped graphics using the Olympic version of *Photodesk* and possibly even explore *DrawWorks* just a touch more.

As I said before the graphics scene is very interesting at the moment so please do bring me to task if you think I'm not dealing fairly with your favourite graphics application — even if it's not being currently developed. There's much that I might miss in all the excitement!

Contacting AU

graphics@acornuser.com
John Cartmell

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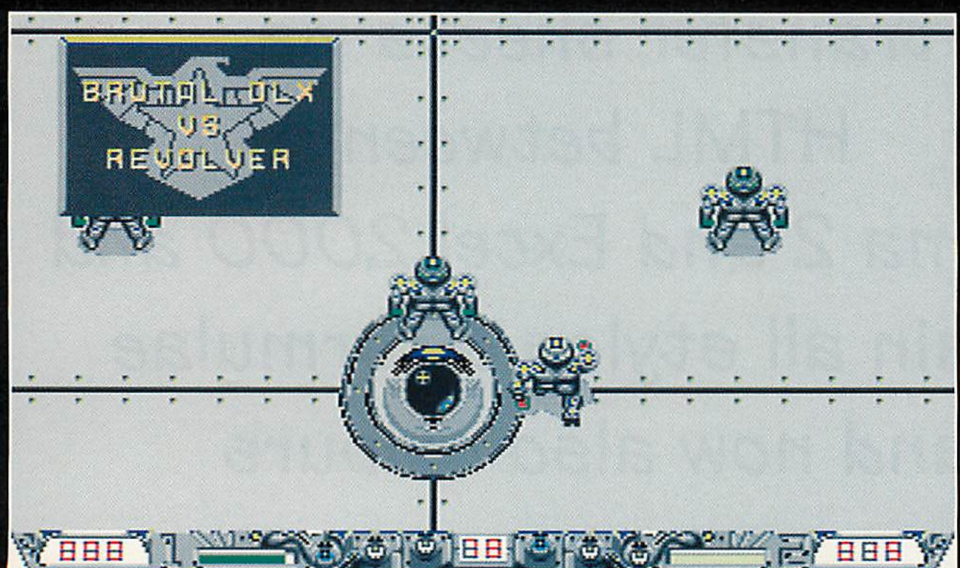
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Continued from page 43

eight directions. Just press fire quickly to release the ball at waist height, hold on means a higher throw. The on-disk manual also mentions an 'aftertouch' which means you can direct the ball anywhere you want to but this is a movement best left to the ultra-dextrous joystick player.

Click-happy players will not find themselves in possession for long and with the added frustration of players jumping to catch, attempting tackles or sliding to intercept at random places around the pitch.

One of the hardest aspects to master in this fast-moving game is that of the successful tackle. You do need to pay attention to the attack/defence attributes of the two players involved and remember that if you lose possession you lose energy! So why not tackle when the player hasn't got the ball and is facing away! Nasty, but effective.

When they lose enough energy players become still and have to be substituted with the neat bonus that for every player you injure, you earn 10 points. In fact forget the goals and go for *bounce domes, stars* and the *score multiplier.*

The first two are areas to hit and light, while the score multiplier increases every score you make, simply throw the ball up the ramp, though you can lose control when the other team throw the ball up the ramp themselves. And rather meanly, two throws cancel out your advantage, another two increase the other team's score by 100 per cent. Think you've got the idea now? Wrong, here's the *electrobounce.*There are four such units and when the ball hits these it become electrified and stops, tackling the first opponent it hits. If you retain possession of the ball after it has tackled an opponent it will remain electrified. This teams up with the score multiplier too at times to really confuse things. As will the items which some unkind soul has littered around the pitch. These take the form of armour or weaponry and very useful they are too.

Tokens affect everyone in your team, and last about six seconds and vary in effect from freeze opponents, reduce their attributes to minimum, increase your attributes to maximum, or both teams to maxim if you find *manic.* Add to these items to slow, grab the ball, transport, close the goal door, shield against tackles, energy boosts, speed boots, intelligence helmets, chestplates for greater defence, shoulder armour for stronger attacks, power glove, bottles of glucose for stamina, or mean shades for greater



aggression, an armplate enhanced throwing or just collect the money - worth a 100 credit.

One of the best aspects to savour is your own personal replay option where you can relish your goals all over again. This is a complicated game to get to grips with, but truth to tell, start playing and you'll soon pick it up. Best played in 2-player mode for atmosphere, the 1-player options give you a hard game too. Polished, complex and well worth the money.



Gods

Now you know when you've played a game too much in your past, when you put it on for the first time in years and automatically know to duck and run for the knife you need to kill your first baddy with. After fiddling with my monitor to get it to play ball with the game screen, it was as if I'd never been away.

In essence a platform and ladders game, you are pitted against mythological creatures. But being a hero you need just to keep up your strength and all will be yours.

The manual is on disk complete with the scenario you are playing in. I read it with a certain nostalgia and then promptly forgot it and began my hack and climb.

Another Bitmap Brothers classic with great graphics, humour and detail, it is amazing what you can wonders you can perform with a combination of five key presses. The usual crouch, turn, jump and fire combination is obvious but you'll need the manual to tell you how to store and drop items from your inventory - you'll only allowed three at a time and keys are essential so never pass one by. While you're there read up on how to deal with switches, levers and buttons as you'll not make it out of Level 1 if you don't.

Fighting your way through legendary cities is of course all in a day's work for a hero but the prize is immortality, so the challenges and nasties get nastier all the time.



Within the cities are traps, hidden doors and tunnels with the odd labyrinths and tower thrown in. Of course there are strange and evil beings, but the real change are the four great guardians. If you don't destroy them there will be no return trip to Mount Olympus and certainly no immortality.

You start in the city itself and as with each level this is split into three sections called *worlds*. Travel safely and defeat the guardian before trying your hand in the temple, labyrinth and finally the underworld.



shurikan, fireball, spear. I particularly like the fireball as these can be used at the same time as a dagger or shurikan.

Once your brawn is fully augmented you need to see to the brain. Puzzles will test the little grey cells, just remember that these fit into two categories - *progression puzzles* need to be solved in order to go on such as a switch to remove a trap. While *reward puzzles* are not essential rather providing treasure, shortcuts or access to a hidden room. As you travel puzzles become more complex with combination of actions and a time limit.

As the combatants grow stronger, fortunately for you the weapons improve from the simple throwing knife you start off with. But these will not answer all your prayers, and strangely, but luckily, each level has a useful shop open 24-hours a day. So don't pass by those gems either as you'll need them to augment your arsenal. Different weapons have different strengths and qualities, and you need to understand what they do quickly. A useful point is that collecting several of the same weapon will make your shots more effective!

A word to the wise, having navigated the city successfully, don't get too complacent as when you find yourself in the temple there are creatures who will try to deprive you of your hard-earned wealth and items. However, you can use this trait to make them stop and pick up treasures and so give yourself more time.

There are some useful hints and tips in the manual, especially the one regarding the cross and the poison ... In addition there are special tokens in the game which will print a clue along the bottom of the screen, providing a hint, solution or location. But they're only shown once!

The major restriction is that you are only allowed to carry three items (not including gems) but keys are one use only so don't worry about losing it once used. There is no map in the packaging and although you can succeed without major mapping, if you want to achieve the best high score, start making notes to find the best route. Not only ladders and doors will give you access but there are teleport gems and secret passages to take into account.

The colour and shape of a key indicates what type of door or entrance it will open and likewise the colour of a chest gives a clue to its value.

Money is essential, not just for weapons but for shields, food and potions. Shops appear halfway through a level as well as at the end, and are entered by walking over a special token which calls on the shopkeeper to escort you to his store. The description of the item and price are displayed with your disposable income on the left. So, as soon as you can, supplement your dagger with a

So with your three lives and limber finger you are ready. Death means a restart, although when you lose a life you return to the beginning of the zone in which you died, thankfully retaining weapons and potions. Finish a level and you are presented with a password. Use this to restart inside the shop ready to purchase more essentials for such a mammoth undertaking.

Summing up

Sphere is the prettiest. Speedball the most strategic but, to my mind, Gods is the best. So far anyway, how about a re-release of Populous? END

Product details

Product:	**Spheres of Chaos**
Price:	£15
Web:	*www.chaotica.u-net.com*
E-mail:	*ian@chaotica.u-net.com*
Product:	**Speedball 2**
Product:	**Gods**
Price:	£8 each, £15 for both
Supplier:	R-Comp Interactive, 22 Robert Moffat, High Legh, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6PS
Tel:	01925 755043
Web:	www.rcomp.co.uk
E-mail:	rcomp@rcomp.co.uk

Planetary suite

Part one of Mike Cook's look at Image Processing

I have always been interested in image processing, indeed I was perhaps the first person to do image processing on a micro computer when I made a real time frame grabber in the late 70's.

Image processing was a virtually invented in the 60's when NASA was running its Ranger moon missions. These would hard land on the moon, a much nicer term I always thought than crash, taking pictures as it went. The problem was that some of the space craft's electronics caused patterning on the images and image processing was invented to come to the rescue.

It took over 35 hours to correct a single image on one of the most powerful main frame computers of the day. Something that today could be done in a matter of seconds.

So when NASA started releasing raw image data from some of it's missions in the 80's I was first in the queue to get my hands on them. However, it wasn't until the advent of the Risc PC, that there was Acorn hardware that could really be turned to the task. With the advent of a true 8 bit graphic display and 16 or 32 bit per pixel screens image processing became a possibility.

Now *ChangeFSI* has always been the premier image converter / viewer application but it did not cope well, if at all with the file formats that NASA put out. These are mainly the FITS, PDS and VICAR formats and whilst it could cope in theory with some of these, the numbers NASA put in the headers often confused it.

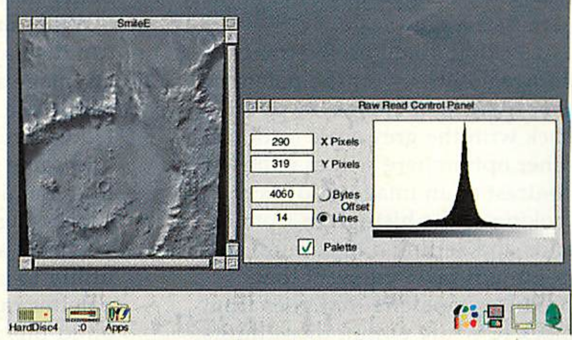
Unlike more modern formats these NASA favoured ones consist basically of an ASCII list of objects in the file followed by the objects as number fields. These ASCII headers are easily read by people with a basic text editor and so are self documenting, allowing you to write a computer program to read them. The headers are usually in a fixed format of 80 characters per line, showing their lineage from the punched card, and contain things like number of pixels per line and number of lines in the image. In addition there are details of the mission, date and instrument that took the image.

Box 1 shows a typical header for a composite image made from the two Mars Viking orbiters. It starts off describing the number of records, or lines in the file and then the number of bytes per record. Then you see there are 333 records in the file out of which 9 are devoted to labels or header. The next section shows you where the data actually is, the histogram is 10 records in from the start and the image is 14 records or 14 * 290 = 4060 bytes from the start of the file. Then there is something about the image in terms of what it is and what images it was composited from. Then there is a description of the format of the histogram and the image. Finally there is a whole lot of data about where on Mars the image shows.

Now you could write a program to extract the information and display the image, but, it could be that the header is slightly different in the next NASA mission. However the images are all simple bit fields at the end of the file. What I really wanted was a program that would display any file as an arbitrary X-Y image, hence I developed "Raw Read" especially for NASA images. It is limited to uncompressed images up to a maximum of 8 bits per pixel and has a useful if rudimentary image processing capability. What is more it is designed to be used in conjunction with other applications I have written to form an Image Processing Suite.

One problem I quickly ran into when developing this application was the very slow speed of the CDFS when you are reading a file one byte at a time. So to counter this there are three memory options that Raw Read can use. The first is to simply read the filling system, it can be slow but uses the minimum amount of system memory. Then you have the option of reading the file into a temporary file on the hard disc. It's faster than reading from a CD and it doesn't require extra RAM, however it does require some free disc space. Finally the default value reads the whole file into RAM and then works with this. This is by far the quickest method but does require you to have twice as much RAM as the picture takes to display.

Operation is conventional, clicking on the bar icon brings up a control window. Set the X and Y size of the image in the icons. You can also specify an offset, this is the



The image associated with the header in box 1. The histogram shows the actual image only occupies half the dynamic range of the display. This is the Smiley crater on Mars, proving that Martians have a sense of humour.

A pseudo colour image of Venus from the Magellan probe. Note the radar bright lava flows from a dark central volcano, and that the palette file has colour entries only over the range of values in the image.

amount of the file to miss out at the start, before displaying the image. Once you have set this up then by dragging any file onto the icon bar and will display that file as an image with those parameters. If you see the image torn or displaced then you know that you haven't got the offset of X pixels set correctly. If you get an end of file message then you have specified too many Y pixels. If the image is full of snow then maybe it isn't an image at all.

You will also notice that the Control Panel window now displays the image histogram and under that the image palette used to display the image. The image histogram is a graph of the number of pixels at each intensity level, this shows you about the dynamic range of the picture and altering this is the first step in image processing. This can have a very dramatic effect on the image bringing out detail that you wouldn't otherwise see.

Raw Read alters the histogram not by altering the pixels in the image but by imposing a palette on the image. This palette is shown under the histogram and is initially set up as a grey scale.

Clicking Menu on the image allows you to invert the palette to give a negative image, or put it back with the grey scale option. The other option here will maximise the contrast of an image. It does this by looking at the histogram from both ends and setting a maximum and minimum pixel value. It then produces a palette that goes from black to white within these limits. Sometimes if the offset is not correctly set, then some false values may stop this feature from working to its full effect. We can impose any palette on the image simply by dragging a palette file onto the image, but more of that later.

The values to put into the control window can often be worked out by reading the header of the image file, this can be done by opening the file in a text editor like *Edit* or *Zap*. However, dragging an image file into the control window will cause *RawRead* to try and read the header in of the file and set the controls accordingly.

Note due to the number of different formats this is not always successful. If you have a series of images of the same type then by checking the "Read Header" in the icon menu this will automatically be checked before displaying the file. This can be useful but is only an aid to using this tool.

Basically any file can be rendered as an image and so this applications is a tool for exploring files rather than a specific image file format reader. While this applications produce grey scale images you are best viewing them in a 16 bit (thousand of colours) or 24 bit (millions of colours) mode. This is because in an 8 bit (256 colours) mode there are only 16 shades of grey that can be displayed. This increases to 64 grey shades in the 16 bit mode and 256 shades in a 24 bit mode. The applications will work in any screen mode but the higher the mode the better they will look.

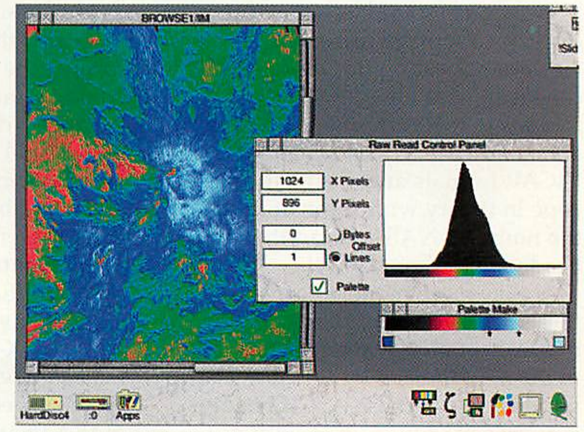
With *Raw Read* you can display any file as an image and save the result as a sprite file. However, in order to add some flexibility into the histogram processing I have written a separate utility to manipulate palettes rather than build this function into the display application. Separating functions like this makes things much more flexible and is an approach that tends to be ignored. I think it is far better to have several programs of limited function working together rather than a fixed bolted program. In this way improvements can be made as and when required.

So to this end I wrote *PalMake,* this allows you to construct 256 colour palette files. It has a small window that displays a palette strip that is the same size as that used in the *RawRead* applications. This window may be dragged onto the control panel window and so the palette and pointers will have a correspondence to the image histogram.

The arrows represent set points in the palette and these can be dragged about. Then a number of operations can be performed that fill in the palette entries between these points. The colour corresponding to the palette entry at the pointer is displayed in the two boxes at either end of the window.

Clicking on these boxes brings up the colour choosier so you can set the colour at that point. This would be exceedingly tedious if it were not for the menu options that create a range of colours between the two set colours.

The menu will bring up a list of palette manipulation options, perhaps the most interesting one is the Interpolate sub menu. This creates a new range of colours between the pointers. Grey wedge creates a grey scale between the pointers and leaves the area outside them unchanged. Grey scale does



The same image again, but note how the pseudo colours bring out the structure of the lava flow, in blue, allowing it to be more easily seen.

the same except the area outside the pointers is set to black or white. The colour options are done by straight line interpolation in either RGB or HSV colour space. The colour space option changes the intermediate colours chosen. Finally the "From left" and "From right" options fill the palette to the other pointer with one of the chosen colours. Most of the other options are self explanatory.

By creating short grey palettes you can enhance the contrast of the image. Alternatively for a monochrome image colour washes can be created, this is useful for example with the Venus Magellan images, where the images are derived from radar and as such have no colour validity at all. However, Venus landing probes have shown a light yellowish wash to a basically monochrome image, Mars is quite similar only it looks red. This creates what is known as a pseudo colour image.

Other, more wacky, palettes and effects can be created, for example a rainbow palette can be used to colour thermal images or bring out detail in an image that is hard to see. Once made, a palette can be saved to disc or dragged directly from *PalMake* into a *RawRead* image display window.

In fact there are two versions of *PalMake*, an Archimedes version and a Risc PC version. The only difference is the colour picker that comes up when you click on the pointer's colour boxes. In the Risc PC version a standard colour choosier box comes up to allow you to chose the colour. In the Archimedes version you have a small 256 colour window.

You might think the Risc PC version would always be preferable on a Risc PC but I have found that sometimes the simpler colour choosier is the best to use. Whatever version you use the best results are obtained in the higher colour resolution screen modes, especially when young a range of interpolated colours. These will look blocky in only an 8 bit mode but continuos in the 32 bit (16 million) colour mode. This is because you can have colours in a palette that can't be displayed in lower colour bit modes, but they are still there in the palette.

These are the first two applications in the suite, next month I will cover the other two, *RawRead32* that allows you to look at images with a resolution of more than one byte per pixel and *CompMake* to allow composite colour images to be made from monochrome images taken through separate red, green and blue filters. Finally I will review the missions that NASA has on offer.

END

A typical file header

```
CCSD3ZF0000100000001NJPL3IF0PDS200000001 = SFDU_LABEL

/*            FILE FORMAT AND LENGTH */

RECORD_TYPE              = FIXED_LENGTH
RECORD_BYTES             = 290
FILE_RECORDS             =  333
LABEL_RECORDS            =  9

/*            POINTERS TO START RECORDS OF OBJECTS IN FILE */

^IMAGE_HISTOGRAM        = 10
^IMAGE                   = 14

/*            IMAGE DESCRIPTION */

DATA_SET_ID              = "VO1/VO2-M-VIS-5-DIM-V1.0"
SPACECRAFT_NAME          =
TARGET_NAME              = MARS
IMAGE_ID                 = MG50S030
SOURCE_IMAGE_ID          =
INSTRUMENT_NAME          =
NOTE                     = "MARS DIGITAL IMAGE MAP, 1/ 64 DEG./PIXEL, CENTER
    LAT,LON-50.00,    30.000    "

/*            DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTS CONTAINED IN FILE */

OBJECT                     = IMAGE_HISTOGRAM
  ITEMS                    = 256
  ITEM_TYPE                = VAX_INTEGER
  ITEM_BITS                = 32
END_OBJECT                 = IMAGE_HISTOGRAM

OBJECT                     = IMAGE
  LINES                    = 320
  LINE_SAMPLES             = 290
  SAMPLE_TYPE              = UNSIGNED_INTEGER
  SAMPLE_BITS              = 8
  SAMPLE_BIT_MASK          = 2#11111111#
  CHECKSUM                 =  11100915
END_OBJECT                 = IMAGE

OBJECT                     = IMAGE_MAP_PROJECTION_CATALOG
  ^DATA_SET_MAP_PROJECTION_CATALOG = "DSMAPDIM.LBL"
  MAP_PROJECTION_TYPE  = SINUSOIDAL
  MAP_RESOLUTION           = 64<PIXEL/DEG>
  MAP_SCALE                = 0.925406<KM/PIXEL>
  MAXIMUM_LATITUDE       = -47.50000
  MINIMUM_LATITUDE       = -52.50000
  MAXIMUM_LONGITUDE      = 33.33334
  MINIMUM_LONGITUDE      = 26.62625
  X_AXIS_PROJECTION_OFFSET = -3040.000
  Y_AXIS_PROJECTION_OFFSET = 144.126
  A_AXIS_RADIUS            = 3393.40
  B_AXIS_RADIUS            = 3393.40
  C_AXIS_RADIUS            = 3375.73
  FIRST_STANDARD_PARALLEL = "N/A"
  SECOND_STANDARD_PARALLEL = "N/A"
  POSITIVE_LONGITUDE_DIRECTION = WEST
  CENTER_LATITUDE          = 0.00000
  CENTER_LONGITUDE         = 30.00001
  REFERENCE_LATITUDE     = "N/A"
  REFERENCE_LONGITUDE    = "N/A"
  X_AXIS_FIRST_PIXEL     = 1
  Y_AXIS_FIRST_PIXEL     = 1
  X_AXIS_LAST_PIXEL      = 320
  Y_AXIS_LAST_PIXEL      = 290
  MAP_PROJECTION_ROTATION = "N/A"
END_OBJECT                 = IMAGE_MAP_PROJECTION_CATALOG

END
```



Rank dissension

The educational software industry has attacked the Government's decision to award a £42 million contract to the BBC and Granada, claiming the tender's conditions were altered after it was announced. The two organisations will jointly develop digital resources for GCSE English, French, geography, history, maths and science.

The BBC described the materials as being available through its education Web pages and to be supported by CDs and DVDs. It will spend £6.5 million of licence-payer funds on the project.

However, the Department for Education and Employment's announcement in November 1999 indicated that the materials would be delivered primarily through digital television. This was why broadcasters – the BBC, Granada Media and Anglia Multimedia (now part of Granada) – were involved in trialling the resources in schools.

Dick Fletcher, managing director of New Media Press, known for titles such as Chemistry Set, has written to the DFEE which he claims has signed a "death warrant" for his company by massively subsidising the BBC and Granada.

Similar protests have come from RM, Espresso Broadband and The British Educational Suppliers Association.

A DFEE spokesperson said: "Broadcasting remains central to the service we are buying. Our vision of reaching pupils with these materials at home as well as at school means that delivery over digital TV is vital, but we had always envisaged that delivery over other channels would also be involved."

NGfL – the sequel

Preparation is already underway for the National Grid for Learning Phase 2. The Government has commissioned NM Rothschild to provide the information they need in much the same way as the Stevenson report gave the strategy for the initial stage.

The main Rothschild recommendations are: to bring in big corporations for public-private partnerships to build the NGFL, rather than building relationships with the experienced firms already working in the education market; to set clear targets for bandwidth in schools by 2005; to create one major single Internet portal for UK education ending what us seen as unnecessary and confusing duplication; to set up a credit system for schools and learners to buy NGFL content (and other materials) through the NGFL, with some of the profits going to the government; to create an independent organisation to be an arbiter of the content that should be available through the portal; to subject educational ISPs to special government regulation, hopefully driving drive costs down and performance up; to extend teacher training started via the New Opportunities Fund scheme; and finally a digital curriculum for schools.

Controversially, Integrated Learning Systems (ILS) are enthused about; the concept of public-private partnerships is accepted; with content seen as a commodity rather than an intellectual construct and there was seemingly little input from software houses or schools. To find out more seek out - **www.dfee.gov.uk/consultations**

In brief

Easy access

Assessing and recording are essential tools to any teacher, but they can be time-consuming, uninspiring and underused. Help is at hand thanks to three free facilities.

Discovery, Hot Potato and TexToys all work in a similar way allowing you to create web pages instantly and then link these to your school website or Intranet building a bank of resources.

Discovery's Puzzle Web site – www.ictineducation.org – requires Internet access and a web browser to create puzzling assessments.

Meanwhile Hot Potato is actually a suite of programs which can be download – www.web.uvic.ca/hrd/hotpot/ – providing several types of tests and puzzles with some useful configurations options. In addition, you can include in your tests questions which require answers in sentences and this shows which parts of the answer is correct allowing teacher's to make their own decision when it comes to typos or slightly different wording.

Last, but not least, is TexToys – www.cict.co.uk/software/textoys/ – which is in fact two programs WebRhubarb and WebSequitur. Rhubarb is a cloze program while Sequitur is a logic/story-building program both with teacher configuration options.

Hook, line and sinker

A US survey has reported that students spend so long surfing the Internet and e-mailing friends that their college work suffers. Up to 15 per cent of college students admit that their studies are affected by the amount of time they spend online and that their computer use is "out of control".

Surveying 570 students from the Rutgers University in New Jersey, the report showed that first-year students who use e-mail and chatrooms to keep in touch with school friends and family are most vulnerable spending up to five times as much time online as other students.

But what are the implications for UK students? This age group provides some of the biggest Internet users in Britain and some colleges provide 24-hour Internet access not necessarily realising the vulnerability of some of their users.

Contacting me

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Around the

Produced with and supported by Oxfam, this CD-ROM is based on Beatrice Hollyer's book *Wake up, World*. The program of the same name introduces children to the lives and dreams of six children and their families. This ties in very neatly to the Geography syllabus for Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 and can also be used as a starting point for discussions in other areas such as citizenship.

The children's lives we can invade are varied and really appealed to my Year 3 testers thanks to clear information and high quality and detailed images. There's Sasha from Lekarstvennoye in Siberia which covers a large area but is home to few people due to the extreme cold in winter.

Contrast this with Cidinha who also lives in a Brazilian village called Ludovico near the Amazon river surrounded by rainforest. Or how about Shakeel whose home is Hyderabad in India, or moving to Africa and Ghana, home to Anusibuno. Not forgetting Nathanael in London and Natali in California.

Easy to digest facts are well presented in text and through the audio helping children develop Literacy and independent research skills. In fact the audio can't be turned off within the program as it is essential to some of the activities.

I really liked the writing style used here which is puts forward facts about weather conditions, clothes, physical geography, languages spoken, political history, religion, capital cities, industries, as well as specific problems such as a regular electricity supply in rural Brazil, or the depth of the cold in the winter in Siberia.

Furthermore, rather than just having these facts presented to you, the children speak for themselves as you spend a day with them from the time they wake up and introduce themselves through documentaries about each of the children's lives providing opportunities to demonstrate the similarities and differences. This leads to links to Literacy and Numeracy as well as Geography and PHSE.

These links are supported within the manual/teacher's book with ideas for classroom use as well as the obligatory photocopiable cross-curricular activity sheets. A good deal of thought has gone into these with the each of the 23 worksheets tabulated to show subject and National Curriculum Objectives.

For instance, Sheet 8 entitled Brothers and Sisters has both Maths and PHSE links - Ma/2g *communicated in pictorial and written form* and 4c *children should identify and respect the differences and similarities between people.* What you get is a Carol diagram with an information table. The task being to write/cut and stick the names in the appropriate part of the circle: has brothers, has brothers and sisters, has sisters.



I appreciated the fact that the manual also holds a table of the activities on the CD-ROM and how these relate to other cross-curricula areas and the learning objectives they provide.

There are six activities in total, *How Many?* as you'd expect has a numeracy emphasis with three associated objectives - count reliably at least 20 objects, read and write numerals from 0 to at least 20, and understand and use the vocabulary of comparing numbers. This is complemented by *Playtime!* which works on number pairs to 10. This is joined by *Going to school, What do we wear?* and *Where in the world?* with different Geography objectives, plus *What do we eat?* which is a Literacy-based activity.

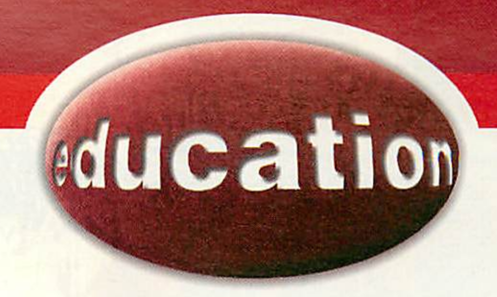


Rather than being ordered by country or continent, the CD is segmented into six key themes. This makes the program easily accessed by younger children and it is very easy to use, just click on the labelled photograph and you're off.

Starting with the central image of the globe will launch you into Places. This shows the various environments that the children live in and provides a gentle introduction to the six countries and also plays host to a mapping activity.

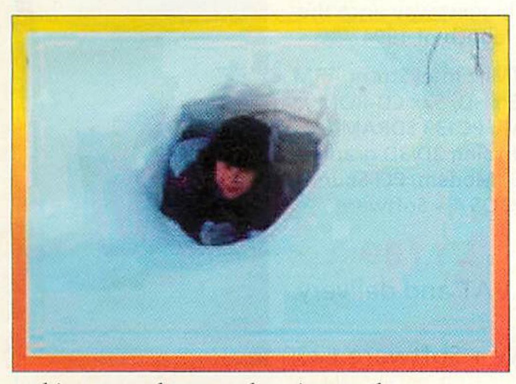
One of the most popular sections, Homes and Families shows what each of the children's homes and their family life. This encourage children to compare their home life and experiences with what they see on the computer and makes an interesting starting point for a Circle Time activity.

This next section brought home the similarities between children the world over more than the other documentaries, as Play shows the different toys and games enjoyed around the world. This is another constant for all children whether playing skipping games, swimming,



world

Get your passport ready as you're invited to six homes across the globe. Pam Turnbull is your tour guide



making snow houses, drawing tracks for marbles in dry earth, making clay toys or having an impromptu game of hopscotch.

Clothes and Weather shows the different climates and hence the different clothes the children wear. As well as giving their views on how the items feel and what they like.

The photography was very important in Food which shows the different diets and how the food is prepared. It also shows that what and how much you eat depends on where in the world you live. Some of the children have a larger choice that others, but a common theme was that children everywhere love to help to prepare food, and to eat with friends and families.

School shows a typical school day, what each of the children study and what the schools are like or not like around the world. Schools vary, some may have lots of classrooms, books, equipment and a playground, or lessons may take place under trees.

One example is Anusibuno's school, which is crowded and her class is shared with younger children and sometimes her friends don't come to school because they have to help their parents at home.

As well as browsing for information there are optional games and activities within the programs. These take the form of interactive activities such as organising data and cloze text activities based on the documentaries, as well as fitting the country shape to its place on the world map or playing a game of food pelmanism.

The program automatically saves with the *extras folder* which you are asked to create the first time you use the program, though you can create this at any time. You can now resume sessions and let the program save or save yourself via the menu button on the mouse.

Activities are also duplicated and supplemented on the linked Oxfam website – *Cool Planet* (see panel) – with a *Gallery* of the children's drawings to which children are encouraged to add. Yet the Web site can only be accessed with a teacher alongside to give access to the Settings Screen.

This is protected from pupils to a small degree as here you can make documentaries and activities inactive or active by simply clicking the table. Just access the S icon and password, and you can now quit the program or access the web link. I would have preferred that children could access the Web link independently but be contained in a *garden wall* site that Anglia is well-known for. However, the site is not child-friendly holding teacher information and downloads, so this is probably the best place for the Web link.

I can see myself using this as a teaching aid, working with small groups or letting children work in pairs on their own. This is made easier as teachers can set up status files for each child or group so there work is saved automatically into a separate file.

It would also be a good program to feature on a library-based computer if you're fortunate enough to have such a beast. Although simple to use for children the teacher support is good, as well as what I've already outlined you can also extract sprites and text from the CD-ROM for your own display work for instance. One to add to your shopping list. END

Product details

Product:	Wake up, World!
Ages:	5-7
Price:	£49 (£20 home user)
Supplier:	Granada Learning, Quay St, Manchester M60 9EA
Tel:	0161 827 2927
Fax:	0161 827 2966
Web:	www.granada-learning.com
E-mail:	orders@granada-learning.com

Cool Planet

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/

Offering what Oxfam call a *global perspective for the classroom*. Here you'll find information on Oxfam in the UK and around the world as well as be able to download/access classroom resources online, or browse Oxfam's Education Catalogue. A nice addition is the section on Global Citizenship. Altogether a useful classroom resource for teachers.

But access the *Wake up, World!* section and you'll find some of the items, information and activities duplicated from the CD-ROM but additional information and views from the featured children on such subjects as, Dreams which presents what these children dream about such as Shakeel and his brand new bicycle, with shiny mud guards and brakes that work. Or Helping others which covers those special jobs all children do for their families, stressing that this is an important part of growing up. In Siberia for instance, Sasha and her brother collect water from the well while Cidinha helps her mother break babassu nuts.

In addition to these this is the place to look at for news of Wake Up, World! events.

Priorities and

The previous round in the UltraGUI tournament was an important one. With it, we have a clearer idea of what UltraGUI looks like and how it behaves; pop-up context sensitive menus in independent, easily manipulated windows are the order of the day.

We now need to refine this broad picture with specifics and a good place to start is with placement of items on the screen. Where and how should windows appear? Where do important buttons go? Where can we stick the rest?

Before we look into these questions, it would be remiss of me to not give you the answer to your homework from last time. I asked what the 20+ ways of closing a Win95 window were. Let me just say that if you managed to figure out more than five of these you did well. In probable order of popularity:

- Click the 'x' icon at the top right of a window.
- Use the file menu to close a child window or exit the application,
- The file menu shortcut of Control+W or similar, and sometimes a shortcut for exit.
- Access the file menu with keyboard shortcuts: Alt+F followed by Alt+C or X for close or exit.
- Double-click the icon at the top left of a window, or single-click to access a menu and select 'close', or use the shortcuts Alt+F4 or Control+F4 to close parent or child directly, or Alt+space (or Alt+'-' for child windows) to open the menu followed by Alt+C for close. The latter can be shortened to Alt+space followed by 'C', or using the arrow keys (to go up or down the menu) and enter (to select 'close'). And so on, *ad absurdum*.

Correct placement

Essentially it's all about placing the most important things where they'll be seen first and where they can be accessed the quickest. Quick access we already know about — Fitts says the edges of the screen, with the top being faster than the bottom. But where does a user look first?

In Western cultures, we read or write top-left to bottom-right, which makes top-left of the screen the most important part of the screen and bottom-right the least important.

There's also the question of screen real-estate. While important things should be easy to access, they shouldn't waste space unnecessarily.

So what important things might there be on the screen? Most obvious are the actual work areas, the places the user does most of his or her inputting. Tied in with these areas is the method used to select between them — the task switching mechanism is likely to be the next most important thing on the screen after the menubar.

Importance then drops off with frequency of use until we get down to things that don't get 'used' at all but are still on screen. A clock, for instance, might be placed in the bottom right corner. Alternatively, if space absolutely must be given to destructive items (for example, a 'trash' utility that deletes files), they could be put in the bottom right regardless of the frequency of their use in order to minimise accidental usage. Screen real-estate usage



other things

Sendu Bala reaches parts other analysers haven't

should be determined by the work areas, the most important screen items.

Most work areas will tend to require more vertical space than horizontal, again given the way we read and write. Combined with the landscape orientation of most display devices, this places a great premium on vertical screen real-estate. Vertical space should, then, be reserved for work areas (windows), with horizontal space used to hold the other on-screen items.

Even horizontal space shouldn't be wasted, giving a trade-off between quick access to items (using buttons) and hiding items until needed (having menus or pull-out/pop-up items). It's worth working out just how many buttons are really needed because it's tempting to simply ignore the trade-off and throw buttons at everything.

Buttons for the few most frequently used functions, in addition to menus for everything else would be good because not only do more buttons waste space, they also confuse the user and reduce usability.

Round Four

So how do existing Operating Systems arrange their contents on screen? Is it worth stealing any of their ideas for UltraGUI? Let's find out in this month's round of the UltraGUI tournament.

We already know a lot about window behaviour from the last episode, but there are a few more subtleties to consider. In Windows they open one atop the other, tending to obscure previously opened windows. The Explorer, however, has a slightly more sensible way of working, with windows opening offset from each other, leaving the window title bars and essential window manipulation tools of each window visible, just as in MacOS and RISC OS.

MacOS, uniquely, tries to open new windows toward the upper left of the screen, so prioritising them and tending to leave space to the right of the screen for other things.

The few buttons and palettes belonging to windows are also on the left so as not to take up vertical space. This compares to Windows and RISC OS which both usually have their many buttons at the top of windows, squandering that space.

MacOS gets back in the running with a shiny new point.

Next up we have menu access. Though rarely true with many Windows applications (with their cacophony of buttons), menus are likely to be the most frequently accessed items on the screen. MacOS gives them highest priority at the top of the screen. Windows scatters them around with a menu bar on each window.

Finally RISC OS doesn't seem to give them any priority at all, with menus not appearing on screen at all (with the exception of buttons that pop up menus, a poor use of buttons). Instead RISC OS makes menus invisible, but the quickest to access. Once you know they're there, you could regard RISC OS menus as even higher priority than MacOS ones, since they are effectively everywhere you look.

It's a similar story for task switching. Less frequently accessed than menus, MacOS hides its task switching within a menu (though it's a high priority menu at the top right of the screen). This saves horizontal space, but the menubar itself forces you to waste vertical space. Windows also wastes vertical space and RISC OS has the iconbar, a place where access to files is achieved, and applications can be manipulated. It's at the bottom of the screen, reflecting the low priority of some of these items, but in fact the right side would have been a better choice.

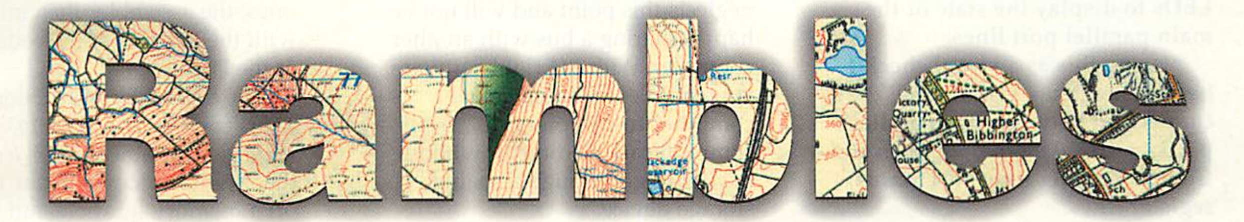
Discs could have been placed at the upper right of the screen, reflecting their medium priority. It would also mean, just as in MacOS, that the discs are not more often than not obscured by windows extending down to the bottom of the screen. Instead the contents of a file (a window in the main part of the screen, toward the left) and it's location on disc (a filer window or menu of some kind, accessible from the right) are both readily viewable.

The RISC OS iconbar could then extend down to bottom right, with a clock or trash in that corner. Even though MacOS doesn't rely on RISC OS' drag-and-drop saving to filer windows (where quick disc access is so important), it still makes discs easier to access, and so richly deserves its second point in this round.

That's about it for this month. I'll just leave you with the scores after four rounds. Windows still languishes on two points. MacOS is gaining back lost ground and has risen to four. RISC OS remains in the lead, but only by one point with five. Till next time. END



RISC OS



Mike Cook buys another round for RISC OS users

I have been getting a few letters lately bemoaning the fact that schools are increasingly going over to the dark side of computing. It struck me that perhaps this was another cause of the leeching away of good teachers, leading to this teacher shortage that we have been hearing about lately.

Quite frankly I can deeply sympathise with any teacher who feels he has had enough. It reminds me of a friend of mine who gave up teaching for something less stressful, he's a lion tamer now.

It seems like an increasing number of our clan are joining Pace Micro Technology to work for a living, the latest recruit in my lab is Robin Terry. If you remember he is the one who wrote the RISC OS version of Ample, the music programming language. Well he told me the other day he has a new version on his Web site:

www.aquitaine.demon.co.uk

This latest one is able to convert the original Ample files into the text files required by his version. So if you have an old masterpiece lurking on those 5.25in floppies they can now experience a new lease of life.

Working here he has picked up the new shared C libraries that are 32-bit compatible, so you will have to download those as well. By the way if you want to work for Pace, send me your CV and I will put it in the system for you. Not purely altruistic you understand I do get a small fee if you get the job.

Sadly, one of my favourite authors, Douglas Adams died this week. Many of his quotes have entered my everyday vocabulary but an excellent one you might not have heard is this:

"I really didn't foresee the Internet. But then, neither did the computer industry. Not that that tells us very much of course — the computer industry didn't even foresee that the century was going to end."

All I can say, Douglas, is:- "So long and thanks for all the fish."

Tony Lindop from Farnborough wants to give some feedback from last month, he writes:



"It's been a while since I felt the need to correspond, but the May 2001 issue of *Acorn User* caught my eye again. Your article about the RISC OS and PC worlds in answer to Mike Constable, has struck a cord. I now have a very similar situation with my trusty A5000 sharing facilities with a cheap PC clone for over 18 months now (monitor and printer switched between the two).

"I tend to agree with your conclusion that sharing facilities between the two systems is best achieved by means of file sharing. I toyed with the idea of an Ethernet-based network between the systems, but decided that a RISC OS Ethernet card was too expensive even though I had a network card built into the PC.

"After much experimentation with direct connections between the two systems using serial and parallel ports, I found a very simple and relatively low cost solution to file sharing. This is an Iomega Zip drive with a SCSI interface.

"The first requisite is an Acorn SCSI interface card capable of handling DOS format Zip discs. My original Cumana interface card could only handle Acorn format Zip discs. I therefore upgraded the card with the Power-Tec PowerROM, which allows access to both Acorn and DOS format zip disks. I am not sure if these are still available now as Alsystems have dropped out of the Acorn market.

"The other change was to add a SCSI Interface to the PC. Iomega and Adaptec market a simple SCSI card specifically designed for the Zip drive only at around £25 (AIC-7850 PCI SCSI Controller). It can only handle one Zip drive and no other SCSI devices on the bus.

"If both computers are connected to the Iomega Zip drive at the same time it is possible for either machine to access the Zip disks. This probably not recommended but it works! I normally have only one machine switched on at a time and under these circumstances either machine can access the Zip drive without any need to change connections.

"If I need both machines on at the same time, this is possible, provided the PC is switched on first and no other SCSI device is switched on other then the Iomega Zip drive. For me this means making sure my Acorn SCSI CD-ROM drive is powered down, otherwise the PC gets hung-up. If the A5000 is turned on first Win98 gets in a mess and tries and find a driver for the Power-Tec SCSI controller!

"This is a cheap, and easy to implement, means of connecting a RISC OS machine to a Windoze PC.

"An alternative solution that I have been experimenting with is to

use the parallel port as a direct PC to Acorn link. I have taken a leaf out of your book and constructed a line monitor board which uses LEDs to display the state of the main parallel port lines.

"Using this as a visual check I have generated a symmetric connection between two parallel ports, with 8 data to data lines and 4 Control register lines to 4 Status register lines.

So far I have proved the following:

1. All communications lines and data lines work between two ports.

2. A set of new communication protocols work UK.

3. Both computers know the status of the others parallel port (ie mono-directional or bi-directional).

4. Data can be sent from one port to the other using hardware handshaking and the data lines.

"This has been done using Visual Basic v3, between an Aleph1 486 PC card and the adjacent PC running Win98. I have to do it this way as I do not have two Acorn machines.

"The next step is to sort out the file transfer protocols to share files between the two machines and then convert the Visual Basic into BBC Basic. It will then allow data transfer between all possible combinations of RISC OS-to-RISC OS, RISC OS-to-PC and PC-to-PC.

"This is a long project even though I am formally retired. A part-time University job takes up most of the spare time I expected to have on retirement! However your article has inspired me to try and progress things a bit further and prove the file transfer between two parallel ports.

"Unfortunately the discipline needed for VB3 programming takes a lot longer than BBC Basic, even though the underlying languages are very much the same. I was planning to publish the programs and protocols at some stage, so this message is something of a sanity check to verify that what I am doing will be of use to some one eventually."

A: There are some good ideas here, I completely forgot about SCSI, it was designed as a multi-master bus. That means it is quite happy having two controllers sharing the bus providing they both initialize correctly. Incidentally the Macintosh interpretation of SCSI neglects this point and will not be happy sharing a bus with another controller. With the right software you could even implement computer-to-computer communications directly, without having to go through a shared storage device.

As to the parallel port idea, since last month I have come across some PC software that links two machines together. The program *PC Anywhere* does this and has recently been placed in the public domain, there is also another one called "Lap Link" but I don't know if that is commercial. Finally if you want to enter the UNIX world then the program to do this is called "Plip". I am sure you will have a band of enthusiastic supporters if you pursue this.

Gareth is still mulling over his machine code program. Remember the questions over the last few months. You can look at the listing yourself on the Web at **www.acornuser.com/support**, Anyway this month he writes:



"Sorry, but there is still quite a bit of confusion on my end, concerning memory addresses in that STR program. You said that the instruction stores R8 in the address given by label pattern length. The only label I can find in that program relating to *pattern_length* is .pattern_length EQUD 10.

"Does this mean to say that you can have a memory address or pattern length's address equal to 10, as to me *pattern_length* only appears to be a counter or is the counter an address in memory as well?

"Sorry Mike, but I still can't see anywhere in the program where *pattern_length* turns from a simple counter for the stripes loop to a memory address. Some things just aren't that simple sometimes are they?"



The important thing to remember is that machine code deals only with either memory locations or registers, try not to mix up the concept of an address and the contents of that address. When you creat a label it is a variable just like any other Basic ones, the assembler then initilises it with the address of the code or data at the lable.

The assembler instruction:

```
.pattern_length EQUD 10
```

creates a variable *pattern_length* that points to (contains the address of) a memory location, and in that memory location the value 10 is placed.

Then any future reference to *pattern_length* returns this address. You can create an address label anywhere in the code for example if you put:

```
.point AND R0,R2,R3
```

and then do:

```
STR R5,point
```

When you execute this instruction you will overwrite the AND instruction with whatever bit pattern is in R5. This is the way to make self-modifying code or, as we say, crashing code.

So to sum up: Putting a point in front of a few letters creates a variable whose value is equal to the assemblers pointer at BASIC terms you are actually doing:

```
pattern_length=P%
!pattern_length = 10
```

when you do:

```
.pattern_length EQUD 10
```

Hope that helps.

Finally Phil Ball an ICT Co-ordinator at Fleecefield School wants some help:



"Has anyone out there found a way to get a HP610 printer to work at a reasonable speed on a RiscStation Lite? I've consulted the people at CTA and they're looking into it. I just wondered if anyone else had any ideas or solutions other than buying different printers, to which the school's budget won't stretch."

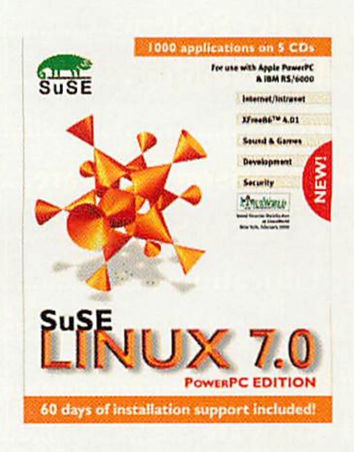
I'll set that one as an exercise for the reader...

Contacting AU

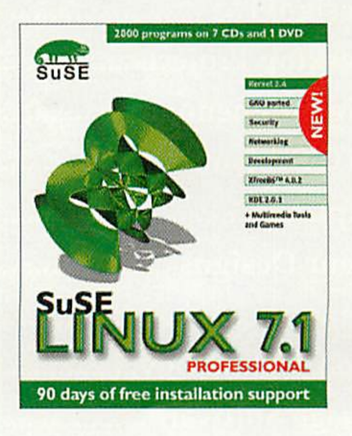
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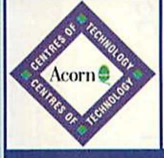


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Musica

I have put up a brief page of instructions for those wishing to create PDF files from *Sibelius7*. There are no illustrations as yet, but I intend to re-write the page soon with more detail and some screenshots.

The results from PDF files created from *Sibelius7*'s PostScript output are quite amazing — I've recently run of hundreds of pages this way which needed to be professional quality.

With most printing firms accepting PDFs is standard and this is the most convenient way to get professional quality printouts of your scores. Or indeed take them to a friend's PC, who happens to have a very expensive printer, as I did.

The URL is **www.arenaman.com/sibeliuspdf.php** Hope it is of some use to someone.

Michael Stubbs
www.arenaman.com

Microsoft get silly

It has been announced in the computer press that Microsoft have unveiled a plan to sell three-year licences for software instead of selling the software itself. If a user wants to carry on using the software when the licence expires, they have to pay again.

I believe this represents a golden opportunity to put RISC OS back in the market place. We need an aggressive marketing campaign where we point out to people that we have fast and powerful computers such as the MicroDigital Omega. We need to make sure the public is aware that we have word processors which can read and write Microsoft *Word* files.

For future development, we need an Excel compatible spreadsheet (which Clares are close to giving us) and we need our Internet software to be capable of all the things that PC Internet software can do (for example, banking with First Direct, music and video).

Perhaps most important of all, we have to make sure the general public are aware that RISC OS exists — we have been far too guilty lately of preaching to the converted. Now is the time to take the message out into the wider world, because we can be certain that if we don't take advantage of Microsoft's folly, the Apple and Linux communities will.

Mark Syder
Merseyside

This certainly is another part of the interesting set of circumstances all coming about together at the same time: The environmental issues, Microsoft's licensing, POSum, Microdigital's Omega, Cerilica's Vantage, the Riscstation portable and so on. There is certainly opportunity here and we need to take advantage of it.

But never forget that you will not convince anyone to change their computer by making them wrong for owning something else, you only make them dig in deeper. We do have TechWriter and we do have SchemEx so compatibility is good from that standpoint.

Many of the Internet problems are actually not at the user's end, much of it is ignorance and arrogance by the Web design companies who assume too much about the software that's accessing the sight and put in code that prevents access from anything other than a PC browser.

Only constant badgering and education will fix this one but we're the kind of people who can do it.

Pricing debate again

Andy Nelson's URL to **www.microlanduk.com** (letters Acorn User June 2001, reference the debate on pricing of "Acorn" machines) is useful. Provided they are a reliable outfit and do actually deliver (there have been plenty of scare stories in the past — apparently none/few of these cheapo firms actually carry stock) then their prices are very interesting.

I am not a dealer of any kind, and I used the prices from Simply Computers to arive at my £642 cost of a very basic PC (Letters, *Acorn User* May 2001). Using MicrolandUK I can get it down to £438, principally by saving £83 on Windows (they will charge an "OEM" price provided you purchase components to go with it — getting around Microsoft's rules).

They also do a very cheap case. One could save a little more by going for very, very cheap and nasty mouse and keyboard, but my aim was to use



reasonable quality but low cost components. I see also that the current "special situation" on memory continues as prices are cut further on ordinary SDRAM to clear it out as DDR SDRAM comes in.

Provided CJE Micros, or somebody, is still offering Risc PC motherboards at £100, fitting one into a PC case might be an interesting project, although with the Riscstation R7500 base at only £586 is there really any point?

Meantime my PC, now mostly 2 to 3 years old is creaking at the joints as I try to run Deus Ex — upgrade time again, and as usual I am looking at quite a few hundred pounds to do so, while keeping what I can of the old setup.

Martin Hodgson
by e-mail

What we need...

In the March issue of *Acorn User* I wrote a letter regarding RISC OS and the Web. I asked about the chances of us enjoying the benefits of Real Audio, Video formats, WMV and so on. These things are important, particularly when you read about teachers' frustrations with our platform.

These standards are vital, visit the BBC site and all of these things are not available to us. Not very good, especially from a teaching point of view? Castle even have the nerve to list Real Audio in their Spring 2001 catalogue as an Industry Standard. Yes it is, but give me an example where we can hear a file of it?

You replied in your editorial that there are Web developments and it was a positive reply. But I don't see any evidence so far. I really hoped for some development in these areas from Pace and Oregan. But no such luck? I would gladly pay for such upgrades. As per usual you were looking through our world with rose-tinted glasses.

Brian Ferris
by e-mail

I occasionally say to people "If I wasn't an optimist I couldn't do this job" which is quite true — but an optimist is not necessarily unrealistic, nor need he be a liar.

Just because nothing has appeared yet does not mean it's not going to, after a company may get vilified for pre-announcing something that does appear. I merely stated that there was development, I didn't say which year it would appear. Either you want to know in advance or you don't, you can't have it both ways.

But let us take a look at just one posting to the acorn announce newsgroup from Leo Smiers:

"Flash is a plug-in for Web browsers that enables you to view flash files. Many commercial sites use this format to make their site more attractive. Besides showing nice pictures and clips the flash object also allows you to navigate through a site, therefore, without the right plug-in it was most times impossible to get see Web sites that are flash only. Although we now have the capability to view flash files not all sites will allow us to enter because they test for other required features or do not detect the !Flash plug-in."

As I mentioned in another reply, the problem is not necessarily at our end, it can be at the other end too. Arrogance is a common failing of the ignorant.

It would be nice if we could have everything now but it is not going to happen overnight, there is a lot of work to be done.



Contacting AU
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Building confidence

The Wakefield Show 2001 has come and gone. It was arguably the biggest show of the year (both in size and importance) and there was an air of anticipation. The Omega was to appear in public for the first time. The RiscStation portable was to have been available to take away and ExpLAN were showing off their Solo project.

On the software front, the first general release of *Vantage* was almost available to buy and a new version of *Oregano* was being demonstrated. There was lots of other exciting stuff such as the POSum and the emergence of a professional video editing package.

It's evident that the anticipation was not groundless, and though not everything that was promised materialised these are certainly exciting times. However, there is a danger amid the excitement as the end of the tunnel hoves into view.

The danger is real and it's happening right now. People are getting over-excited. One only has to skim the newsgroups and even the pages of this publication to see hints of this and that. Most notably, it seems many people were expecting there to be at least one unannounced machine at the show — which was almost true, there was the 300MHz Kinetic Risc PC and also the Slym.

Speculation and hearsay are not necassarily bad, in fact it's an indicator of a market that has many enthusiastic people supporting it. But what happens if the speculation proves to be groundless? People get disappointed, usually the people who had been spreading the rumours and believed in them more than others.

So what if a few people disappoint themselves? That's their problem right? No. This market needs to grow, and it needs to grow now. Every disappointment works against efforts that people are making to attract new users. People believe in a rumour, it doesn't happen. Enthusiasts tend to get rather vocal so it isn't long before someone announces authoritatively that there is no future in RISC OS because x hasn't led to y.

If only people could channel their enthusiasm into more constructive uses. It's actually fairly easy to get people interested in RISC OS, and we can all do our bit. The user groups are a prime example. A year ago I was in two minds about selling my Windows PC and buying a Risc PC. I looked at the Acorn newsgroups to see what was going on in the market. I can't say it was a wholly reassuring experience to read many of the items written but then came a guiding light.

I was contacted by a member of my local user group who had seen my questions and decided to offer some advice. Partially as a result of this advice I bit the bullet, jumped ship and here I am. Great. Super. What now?

Since then, I've attended group meetings and they've all been most interesting. Speakers attend and demonstrate software and hardware or just talk more generally. We've even had a Windows user as a speaker — we aren't totally blinkered you know! The other beneficial effect is that of reasssurance for existing users, the knowledge that there are other, real people using this platform who are more than just names on Usenet postings.

So here's a shameless plug. If you're anywhere near Bristol and could enjoy a couple of hours a month listening to speakers talking about typography, the Internet, LCD monitors or software products come along to BARUG. The Bristol Area RISC User Group meets on the last Wednesday of every month, look at **www.snave.demon.co.uk/BARUG** for details.

If you're further afield, look at the Association of Acorn User Groups Web site for details of your nearest group. Most goups offer free attendance for the first few meetings so if you decide you don't like it what have you lost?

The user groups are an important part of this market. They are an effective means of attracting new users, encouraging faith in RISC OS and retaining existing users. That can only be good for the market and the future prospects of our favourite operating system.

Robert Richards



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